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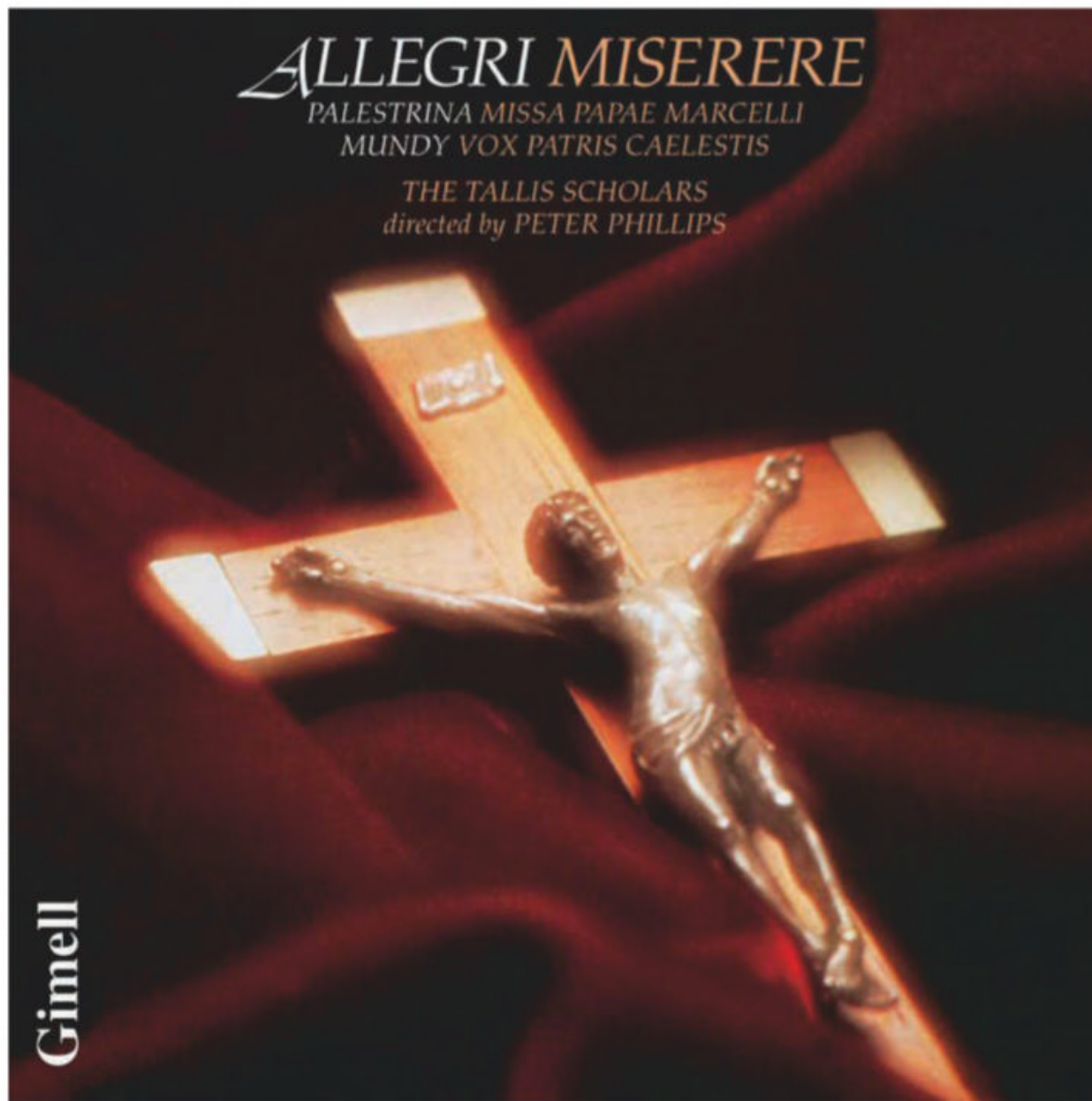


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JS Bach

Solo Violin Sonatas and Partitas, BWV1001-1006

Tomás Cotik *vn*

Centaur © ② CRC3755/6 (119' • DDD)



On this two-disc set of Bach's Solo Sonatas and Partitas, Tomás Cotik's

deeply analytical playing adds to an exhilarating display of the musical wonders the composer saw in the violin. Cotik allows the main lines of the music, their lyrical qualities and above all the overall arcs of each movement to be fully developed and even prioritised. As a result, several of the complete works seem to end in an anticlimactic sigh which in retrospect feels like a moving gesture of humility.

Cotik seems to incorporate the implied harmonies of the music's solo lines so they appear to flash deep pools of colour without impeding the music. This allows Cotik's unerring sense of time and speed to produce results that are engrossing without being mechanically hypnotic. Cotik also leaves the music almost completely unembellished, putting his faith in his command of phrasing, the variety he adds with the light, deft strokes of his Baroque bow and, above all, in the notes Bach wrote. His pure sound, perfect intonation and fast tempos mean that Bach's fiendishly difficult challenges become more exposed, yet he never misses a beat.

In Cotik's hands, the Sarabandes in BWV1002 and 1004 are particularly exquisite. He reveals the delight Bach takes in the intricate little challenges found in the Tempo di borea in BWV1002 and the Allegro assai in BWV1006. His D minor Ciaccona is charming at times, even jaunty.

The recording, made at Portland State University, where Cotik is assistant professor of violin, captures the golden glow of his violin, made by Marc de Sterke in 2000, in sound that is honest and clean.

Laurence Vittes

Brahms

'Brahms in Transcription'

Brahms Hungarian Dances, WoO1 - No 1^a; No 7^a; No 15^b; No 16^b; No 17^b. Symphonies^c: No 1 - 2nd movt; No 2 - 2nd movt; No 3 - 2nd movt; 3rd movt; No 4 - 2nd movt Gluck Iphigénie en Aulide - Gavotte^a Schumann Piano Quintet, Op 44 - 3rd movt^a (transcr 'Brahms,

^aKirchner, ^bReger)

Uriel Tsachor *pf*

MSR Classics © MS1721 (63' • DDD)



During December 1914 and January 1915 Max Reger transcribed five

Brahms symphonic slow movements for solo piano, which he deemed 'utterly playable'. Here these transcriptions receive their first recordings, and prove to be 'utterly listenable' in the cultivated hands of the Israeli-born American-based pianist Uriel Tsachor.

He takes the First Symphony second movement's *sostenuto* directive to heart, spinning out the long lines with tonal amplitude and a burnished legato, while keeping the polyrhythmic textures in fluid perspective. His animated and flexible shaping of the Second Symphony's *Adagio* prevents Reger's difficult-to-voice octave doublings from becoming turgid. The same can be said in regard to Tsachor's handling of the chordal climaxes in No 3's *Andante*. The *Poco allegretto* movement sounds particularly pianistic in that Tsachor's playful turns of phrase and buoyant yet discreet rubato would be difficult to conduct. By contrast, Tsachor follows more of a literal trajectory in the sterner, less affectionate *Andante moderato* of the Fourth Symphony.

Tsachor wisely places solo versions of *Hungarian Dances* in between the Reger arrangements, including first recordings of Theodor Kirchner's two-handed Nos 15, 16 and 17. In Brahms's own solo versions of Nos 1 and 7, Tsachor channels his considerable technique towards poetic and whimsical ends, as opposed to Julius Katchen's scintillating bravura.

Just two half-quibbles. Solid and assured as Tsachor's performance may be of the Scherzo from Schumann's Piano Quintet as 'de-chamberised' by Brahms, I prefer this pianist's slightly faster and more incisive earlier recording for Divox, filled out with his own wonderful solo transcriptions of the Quintet's remaining movements. And his impetuous inflections in the Gluck/Brahms Gavotte strike me as too abrupt and impatient, lacking the simplicity and proportioned eloquence distinguishing the old Josef Hofmann and Ignaz Friedman recordings on 78s. But these teensy reservations should not prevent you from investigating this enchanting and intelligently programmed release. **Jed Distler**

Lentz

Continental Divide. Ending(s)^a

^aFahad Siadat *ten*

Twilight String Orchestra / Nicholas Deyoe

New World © NW80815-2 (53' • DDD • T/t)



There's no need to pigeonhole Daniel Lentz's compositional

aesthetic. He has traversed an array of styles throughout his productive career, from electronic and pop ventures to minimalism and works that embrace varied cultures. The two pieces on this disc are expansive, almost in the manner of tone poems, with ample descriptive writing and, in the case of the recording's eponymous *Ending(s)*, the incorporation of sung texts.

The opening work, *Continental Divide*, is scored for string orchestra and begins in elegiac fashion, with long, Mahlerian lines and upward motifs that attain ethereal, hopeful, occasionally Coplandesque majesty. The terrain changes throughout, embracing jaunty country fiddling and bits of minimalist animation amid philosophical viola solos and the juxtaposition of exultancy and yearning. It is a deeply affecting creation, and played to the expressive hilt by the Los Angeles-based

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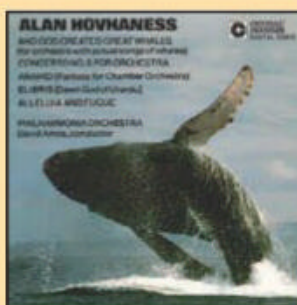
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Horn Concerto. National Phil. of London & Israel Philharmonic. **CD803:** Majnun Symphony. National Phil. of London. **CD804:** Etchmiadzin Symphony, Fra Angelico, Mountains & Rivers Without End. Royal Philharmonic. **CD801:** All Men Are Brothers (Sym. 11, Royal Philharmonic), Prayer of St. Gregory, Tzaikerk, Armenian Rhapsody No.1. **CD807:** Odysseus Symphony, Celestial Gate, Prayer of St. Gregory. Polyphonia Orchestra. **CD811:** Hovhaness Treasures: his favorite works. Christmas Symphony, Celestial Canticle, Starry Night, etc. Gerard Schwarz & Hovhaness, conductors.

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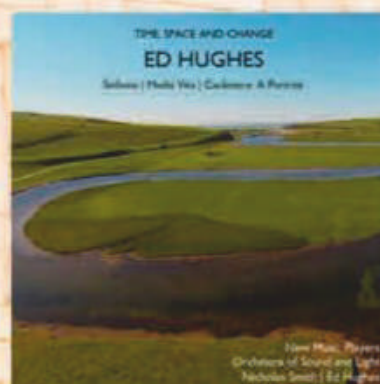
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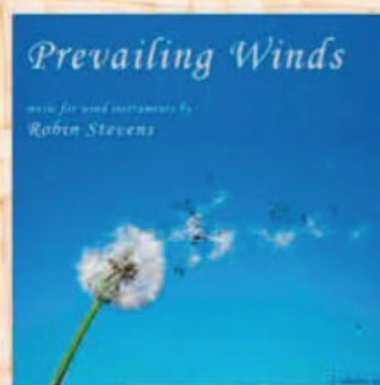
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Contemporary relevance: the Oratorio Society of New York Chorus and Orchestra give a haunting performance of Paul Moravec's *Sanctuary Road*

Twilight String Orchestra under Nicholas Deyoe.

Ending(s), as JM Alexander's illuminating programme note suggests, 'is protest music at its best, music that champions life over those things that try to rip apart the fabric of the country, the society, the self'. That would seem a formidable challenge to depict for any artist, but Lentz's alternation of slow downward chords, violent tremolos, slithering figures and powerful verse settings keep the narrative in propulsive focus. Two of the texts are haiku, one by Yasuhiko Shigemoto, a survivor of the bombing of Hiroshima, and the other, about the ephemerality of life, by the 16th-century poet Ôuchi Yoshitaka. The performing forces are double string quintet and vocalist, here the vibrant Fahad Siadat, who makes the most of the harrowing words, whether in English or Latin. **Donald Rosenberg**

Moravec

Sanctuary Road

Laquita Mitchell *sop* **Taehann Bryce-Davis** *mez*
Joshua Blue *ten* **Malcolm J Merriweather** *bar*
Dashon Burton *bass-bar* **Oratorio Society of**
New York Chorus and Orchestra / Kent Tritle

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 (71' • DDD • T)

Recorded live at Carnegie Hall, New York,
 May 7, 2018

Includes bonus audio documentary, 'Write It!' -
 Reflections on *Sanctuary Road*



The subject of Paul Moravec's oratorio *Sanctuary Road* is William Still (1821-1902), one of the main activists running the Underground Railroad, that extraordinary clandestine enterprise that at its height rescued around a thousand slaves per year in the mid-19th century. Mark Sutton-Smith's 2003 musical *Stand by the River*, also based on Still, focused on just one celebrated escape; but Still himself helped some 800 slaves find freedom. As importantly, he documented their stories meticulously (publishing a record after the Civil War), some amazing examples forming the basis for Moravec's oratorio: light-skinned Ellen Kraft, who disguised herself as a terminally ill, elderly white man travelling to Philadelphia to seek medical attention, with her future husband in tow

masquerading as her slave; Henry 'Box' Brown, who mailed himself in a crate to Still; Isaac Jackson, who evaded capture for a year by hiding in a cave. Almost as moving is the wordless chorale marking the hiatus of the Civil War.

The relevance of *Sanctuary Road* (2017) in our present century cannot be overstated, analogous to that of Tippett's *A Child of our Time* to wartime Britain. If Moravec's music is not quite in that league, *Sanctuary Road* builds – after a slightly unsteady start – into a work of compelling intensity. If much of that is due to the subject matter, Moravec sets the text, drawn from Still's writings by librettist Mark Campbell, with commendable clarity in an attractive score that attains true grandeur of spirit as it proceeds, especially in its extended finale (depicting Still's recovery of his records after the war). Much credit for this goes to conductor Kent Tritle and the Oratorio Society of New York, who commissioned the work; their haunting premiere performance, at Carnegie Hall in 2018 with a finely balanced quintet of soloists, forms the basis of this marvellous recording. Recommended.
Guy Rickards

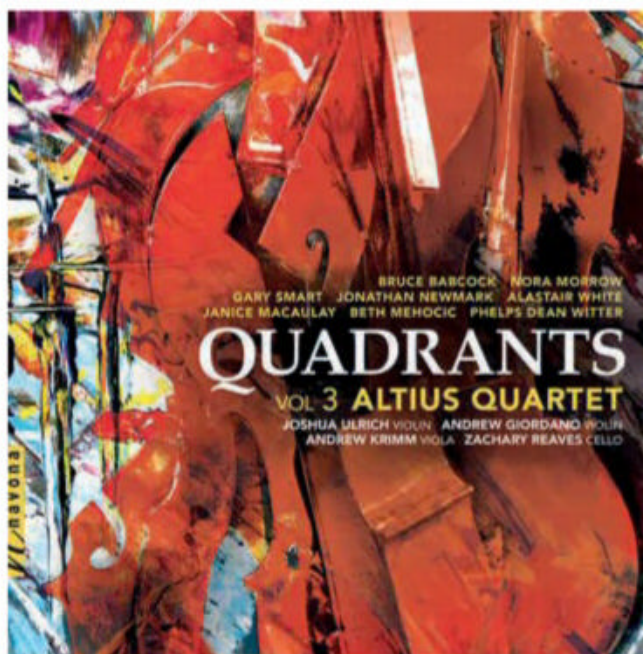


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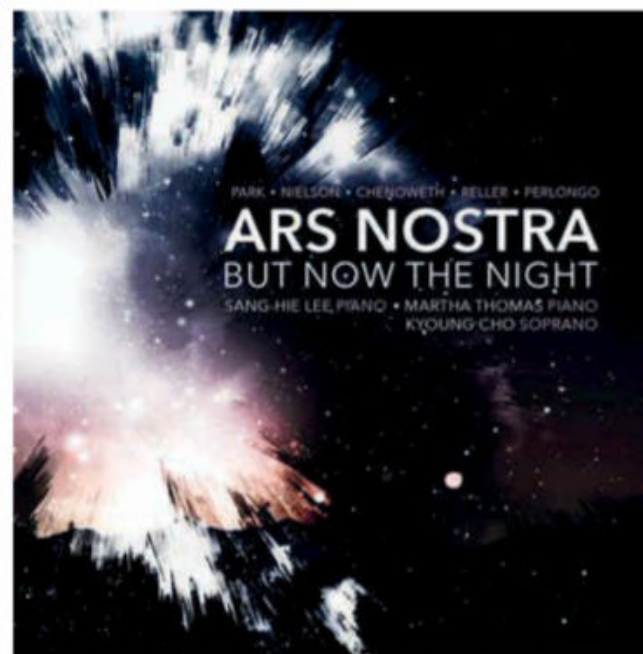


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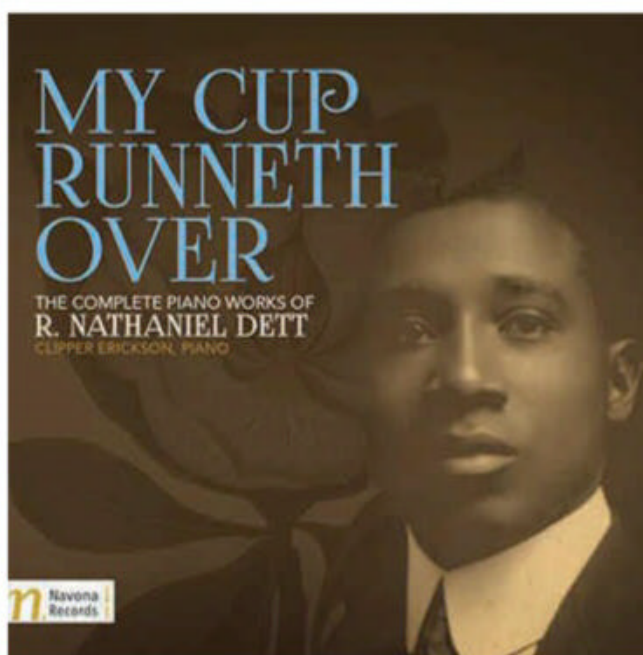


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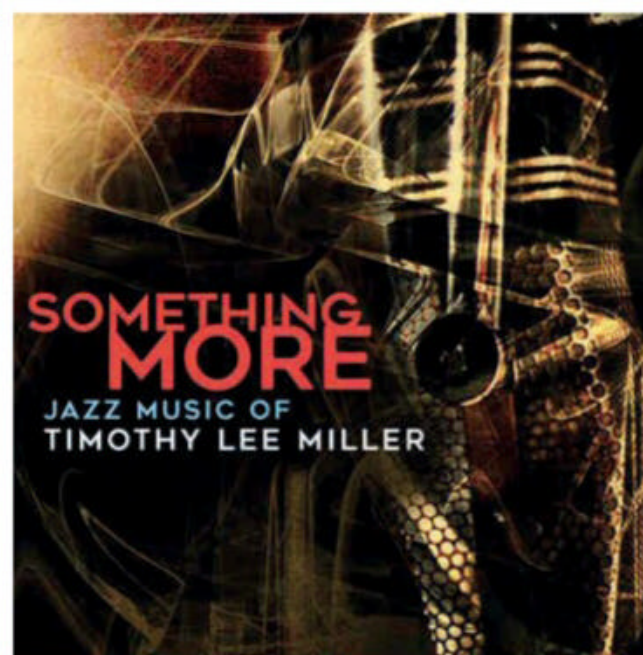


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SOMETHING MORE TIMOTHY LEE MILLER

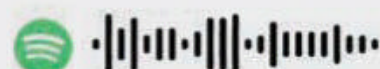
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C Vine

'Aphorisms'

The Anne Landa Preludes. Five Bagatelles.

Piano Sonatas – No 1; No 4. Toccatisimo

Lindsay Garritson *pf*

Lindsay Garritson © 888295 949910 (74' • DDD)



It seems short-sighted for an emerging piano talent such as Lindsay Garritson to bring

out a new CD without including information about herself or the musical contents. The absence of any notes about the music – especially for someone like Carl Vine – is a drawback. No matter if Garritson thinks that the music should speak for itself: some information about the composer who wrote it would be useful.

It's easy to ascertain why young pianists like Garritson are drawn to Carl Vine. His piano-writing is virtuoso as hell, sophisticatedly tonal, and falls gratefully and effectively both on the instrument and on the ear. Everything is extremely well crafted; and while often exciting, the music never threatens or provokes. Conservatory students who are afraid of Frederic Rzewski's music flock to Carl Vine's. Vine's style builds upon the modern conservative aesthetic set forth in the Barber Sonata and Prokofiev's 'War' Sonatas, without imitating Barber and Prokofiev. Actually, 'Thumper', the third of *The Anne Landa Preludes*, contains a passage seemingly lifted from Prokofiev's 'Suggestion diabolique', but no matter.

Garritson's dazzling technique, poised assurance, rhythmic suppleness and clarion sonority are exactly what this repertoire needs. She makes child's play out of all the

bravura passages, from rapid counterpoint at opposite ends of the keyboard to the torrential climaxes of both the First and Fourth Sonatas (the latter recorded here for the first time). In fact, her slightly dry yet galvanising way with the the First Sonata's opening movement's jazzy syncopations makes more impact when measured against Joyce Yang's generalised, heavily pedalled live Van Cliburn Competition recording (Harmonia Mundi, 2/06). At the same time, Garritson also relishes this composer's dark, brooding and introspective side. The recorded sound is bright to the point of strident, while louder moments convey a slightly metallic patina; Vine's sound world cries out for a rounder, more resonant ambience, as does Garritson's mastery, which deserves world-class production values, the support of an established record label and, it goes without saying, an annotator. **Jed Distler**

Symphony Hall, Boston

Our monthly guide to North American venues

Year opened 1900

Architect McKim, Mead & White

Capacity 2625

Resident ensemble Boston Symphony Orchestra

'Beethoven', announces the inscription on the plaque that towers over the middle of the Symphony Hall stage. It's the only one of the several plaques that mark the golden proscenium to have a name on it, apocryphally because it was the only name that the Boston Symphony's directors agreed would remain forever undimmed. And it was the same putatively universal authority of European Romanticism that Henry Lee Higginson invoked with his plans for Symphony Hall as a whole, which gave a new home to the orchestra he had founded in 1881.

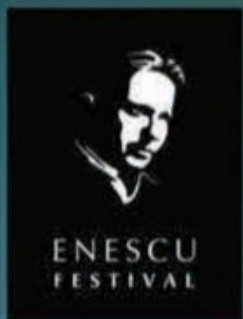
Opened with a gala concert in October 1900, the hall had taken McKim, Mead & White, the architects of the Boston Public Library among other landmarks, since 1893 to plan and a year to build at the cost of \$771,000. Built mostly of brick, it was modelled on the second Gewandhaus, the Leipzig hall that was later destroyed in the Second World War, but whose shoebox shape and storied heritage were attractive. The architects employed a Harvard physicist, Wallace Clement Sabine, to achieve the ideal reverberation time of about two seconds through thin balconies, a long, low stalls section and an airy upper area decorated by 16 mythological statues.

Named a National Historic Landmark in 1999, the hall has remained much the same for 120 years. The original organ fell out of fashion and was replaced in 1949 by an Aeolian-Skinner. But with other refits the Symphony has taken great pains to remain faithful to the original plan, as when even the nails were matched by hand to their historic predecessors when the stage floor was replaced in 2006, or to uncover original intentions when they had been lost, as with the opening in



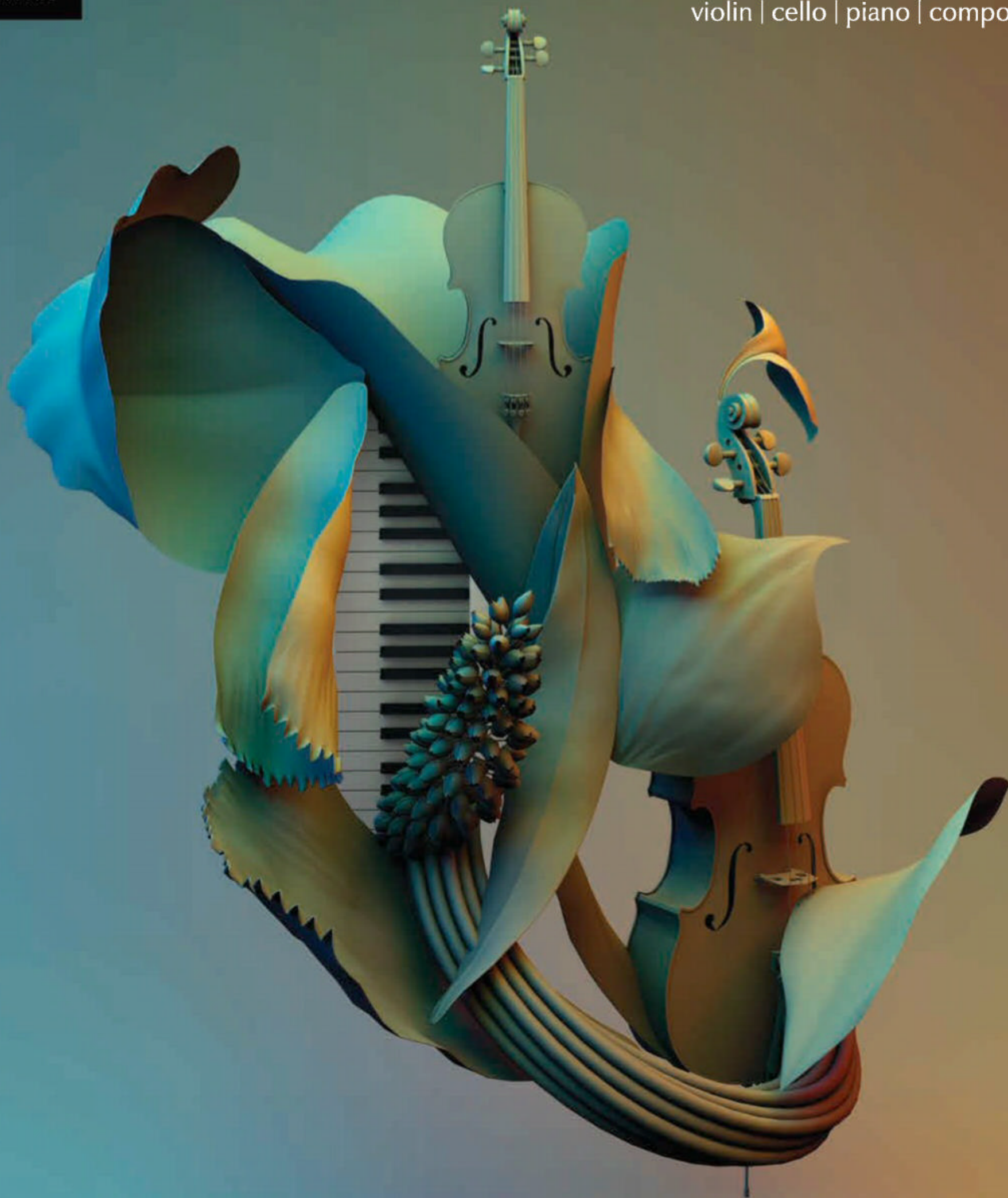
2008 of the clerestory windows, which had been nailed shut since the 1940s.

The result is an acoustic of extraordinary fidelity. Sonically there are few bad seats in the house, although the best are not in the middle of the stalls, where balances can become slightly unkempt, but a third of the way back in the first balcony on the side. There, what you hear on record comes brilliantly alive, whether the brazen power of Andris Nelsons's Shostakovich cycle, the lucid warmth of Bernard Haitink's Brahms or the luxuriant clarity of Colin Davis's Sibelius. None of that is a trick of the microphones; it can still be heard in what must rate as one of the finest halls in the world. **David Allen**



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Beauty in life



A LETTER FROM *Seattle*

Thomas May reports on an intimate performance space that boasts a range of audiovisual technologies



My last dispatch (7/19) mentioned the opening in March 2019 of Octave 9: Raisbeck Music Center, a brand-new Seattle Symphony performance space. Tucked away in a corner of the orchestra's Benaroya Hall complex in downtown Seattle, the \$6.7m Octave 9 was established with the aim of offering more than an intimate venue in which to make music.

Though tiny – typical capacity is 80-85 – the space is equipped with sophisticated audio and visual systems. Nested within the ceiling's honeycomb design and throughout are 62 speakers and 10 subwoofers, all part of an intricate constellation by Meyer Sound that allows the room to be adjusted to a vast range of desired acoustical effects and manipulated in real time. Prefer the neutral, dry impression of a classroom for lecturing or the aural expanse of a vast cathedral?

Either sonic environment, and countless ones between, can be readily configured. Visuals can be projected on to a total of 13 encircling screens.

A series of recent events at Octave 9 underscored this initiative's potential to enrich Seattle's musical life. I initially referred to the space as an aspiring 'mini-IRCAM', in which composers and performers can experiment with new interdisciplinary projects. No one to date has explored this facet with more determination than the adventurous cellist Seth Parker Woods. Also an admired new-music curator and educator based at the University of Chicago, Parker Woods concluded his year as Octave 9's inaugural artist-in-residence with a richly rewarding programme in February.

The cellist performed in the first-ever Octave 9 concert and also played an integral part in a 24-hour marathon held there shortly after it opened in March last year. The event at the end of his residency resembled a mini-marathon packed with new discoveries. Parker Woods curated and performed a concert of six contemporary works, five of which were world premieres and one a Seattle premiere. All six composers were present.

Chanting lines from Dudley Randall's poem *Primitives*, Parker Woods opened the programme with Fredrick Gifford's new piece *Difficult Grace* (the title uses a phrase from the poem), which is scored for speaking cellist and multichannel electronics to create a multi-textured dialogue between the rhythms and sounds of the Randall text and Parker Woods's voice and cello as a kind of mega-instrument. A new video enhanced the enraptured state of Monty Adkins's *Winter Tendrils* for cello and tape, while Ryan Carter's *Default Mode Network for Cello, Electronics, and Audience* enlisted everyone with mobile phones as participants.

Nathalie Joachim's *The Race: 1915* had Parker Woods recite a newspaper's chronicling of brutal racism while underscoring striking images from painter Jacob Lawrence's brilliant *Migration*

Series. The most affecting piece was *My Heart is a River* by London-based Freida Abtan, which married the cellist's most introspective playing with an affecting visual narrative of liberating dance. French-Canadian Pierre Alexandre Tremblay's *asinglewordisnotenough3 (invariant)* had Parker Woods – who signs his emails 'cellist and movement researcher' – draw raw, gritty gestures from his instrument.

'I wasn't sure what Octave 9 would be at first – there were so many moving parts,' Parker Woods told me after the concert. His residency, which began with his work as a consultant on the initiative while it was under construction in 2018, has involved learning 'how to harness the space as an instrument and to play the room – not just with special effects'.


In fact, two other concerts early this year illustrated the powerful experiences that can unfold in Octave 9 even without deploying its array of bells and whistles. Both cases

involved guest artists at Seattle Symphony in town for concerts in the big hall.

Patricia Kopatchinskaja, who would give a searing, deeply personal account of Shostakovich's First Violin Concerto the following night, devoted her Octave 9 programme entirely to the *Kafka Fragments* of György Kurtág. The violinist was joined by the soprano Ah Young Hong, with whom she will record the work later this year.

With the most minimal of staging – a little movement around the playing area, which was bathed in a purplish light reminiscent of an old-fashioned darkroom, as a friend pointed out – the duo captured the sense of life-altering epiphanies that make Kurtág's settings so endlessly fascinating, whether in the single stroke of a bow or in the sustained intensity of 'The True Path'.

The following week, Gidon Kremer tuned up his audience for his subsequent Seattle Symphony engagement as the soloist in Mieczysław Weinberg's Violin Concerto by playing a dozen of his own transcriptions for violin of the composer's 24 Preludes for cello as well as the First Sonata for solo violin. Bridging the Weinberg selections with a breathtaking account of Bach's Chaconne in D minor, Kremer, in this intimate setting, seemed to distil a lifetime of experience.

As part of his artist residency, Seth Parker Woods will return in June to make his own Seattle Symphony debut in the world premiere of composer-in-residence Tyshawn Sorey's newly commissioned Cello Concerto. At the end of his year with Octave 9, he says the venue's essential strength is that it enhances 'the possibilities for storytelling. All work can exist there, not just new works. It's about how you realise new interpretations and can create drama and theatre. Octave 9 is a place where people can take the time to make it a unique experience.' 

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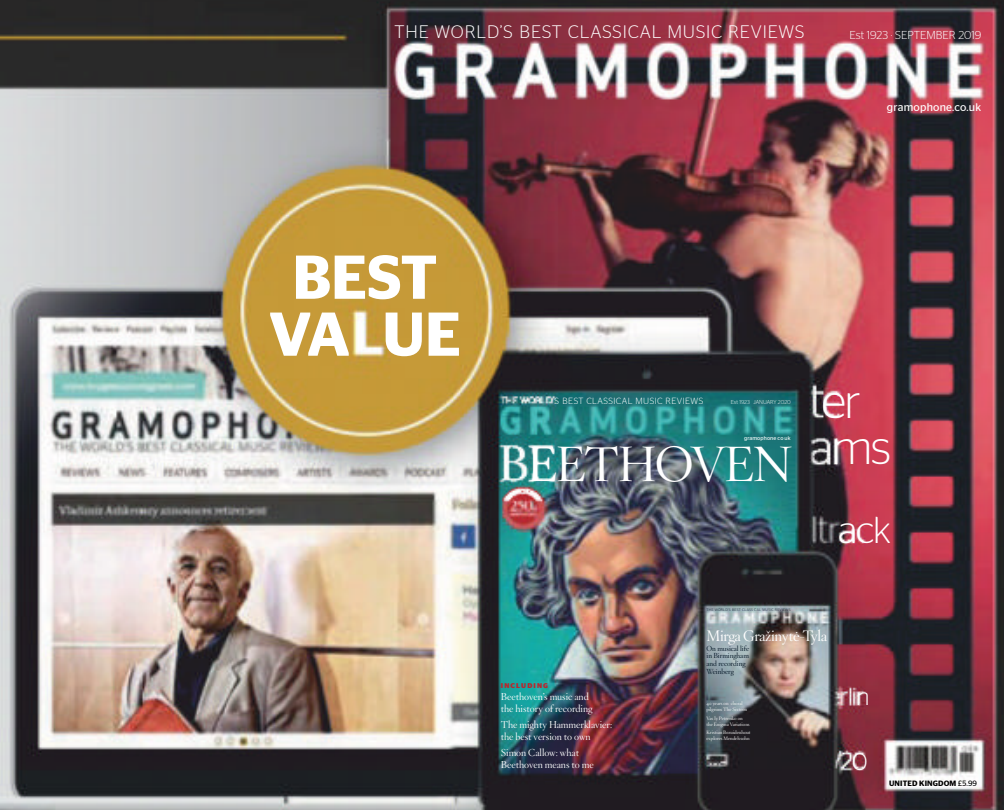
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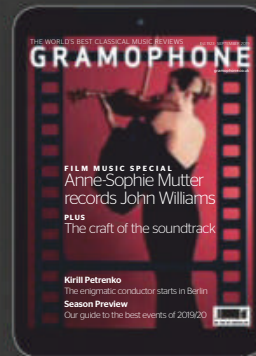
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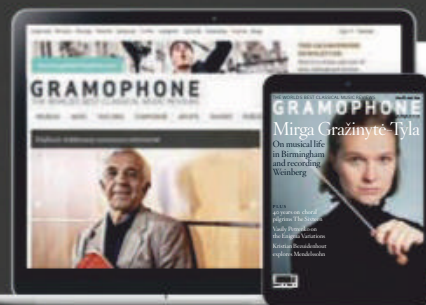
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Travel helps to broaden the musical mind

During his interview for this month's cover story, the Icelandic pianist Víkingur Ólafsson – *Gramophone's* current Artist of the Year – reflects on the impact of travel, or more specifically of not travelling, on his musical development. He grew up in Iceland at a time (relatively recently, really) when it was not so easy to journey abroad, when the opportunities taken for granted by his contemporaries in, say, Britain or America, to be exposed to other musicians or to absorb a diversity of music-making, were not available to him.

Being a reflective person, Ólafsson looks back on this to see how it shaped him: perhaps therein lie the roots of his love of recordings, his musical friends having been, via that medium, the likes of Evgeny Kissin, Alfred Cortot and Dinu Lipatti; perhaps there was also a freedom for him to find his own musical path, a well-trodden one not otherwise being laid before him.

And yet, travelling the world, whether as an artist or as an audience member, is vitally enriching; learning from others enriches us all throughout our lives. For an intriguing example, listen to a recent *Gramophone* podcast in which Paavo Järvi reflects on how he feels the different cultures of Europe and Japan inform his experience of orchestral music-making. Speaking of Japan, that the music of a German Lutheran composer, JS Bach, should have found such a profound place in that country courtesy of Masaaki Suzuki (with unstinting support from a Swedish record label, BIS), speaks of the moving universality of the greatest art: Bach Collegium Japan's new *St Matthew Passion*, our Recording of the Month, is truly beautiful.



Martin

And so we come to our Festival Guide, our epic, 32-page insight into the hundreds of festivals of so many shapes and sizes, styles and genres, throughout the UK, the rest of Europe and North America. However you use it, whether to plan travel yourself or to mark out performances nearer to home but which, no doubt, feature musicians who themselves have journeyed considerable distances to perform for you, the meeting of people from different countries and cultures, either literally or within the repertoire they play, is something our art form excels in.

As I write, however, the coronavirus – or more specifically, the attempts to contain the dangers of it spreading – is having an impact on this very subject: on travel, on tours, even in some countries on public events such as concerts themselves.

Given monthly magazine lead times (this won't reach you for several weeks) there's little point trying to cover it in our news pages. I hope that by the time you read this we'll already be looking back on a short-term period of uncertainty, grateful that things are now back to how they were. I'm equally aware, of course, that this may not yet be the case. My thoughts are with those directly affected by the illness itself. And if, for a time, we find international or even local performances curtailed, it's a reminder when things return to normal to value the internationalism of music-making (indeed the international exchanges of culture and friendship in general) all the more – a precious and privileged thing, and something that should never be taken for granted.

martin.cullingford@markallengroup.com

THIS MONTH'S CONTRIBUTORS



Writing our feature on overlooked Beethoven recordings was a labour of love for **ROB COWAN**.

'Relistening to Dorati's proudly assertive Fifth, Jochum's heavens-storming *Choral* and the Vlach Quartet's ethereal C sharp minor Quartet – among others – was a real joy,' he says.



'Each year I write the Festivals Guide, I become more obsessed by the musical and cultural adventures on

offer,' says **CHARLOTTE GARDNER**. 'Last year, I visited Tsinandali, Verbier, Beaune ... Next month it's Göttingen and Kronberg. I hope this year's guide inspires readers to explore as many of them as possible.'



Surveying the recordings of Beethoven's Ninth for a *Gramophone* Collection is a formidable task

but one that **RICHARD OSBORNE** was happy to take on: 'Like it or loathe it – as Bernard Shaw said, the finale can be a trial – it's the right kind of monument to erect in Beethoven's anniversary year,' he says.

THE REVIEWERS Andrew Achenbach • Nalen Anthoni • Tim Ashley • Mike Ashman • Michelle Assay • Richard Bratby • Edward Breen • Liam Cagney • Alexandra Coghlan • Rob Cowan (consultant reviewer) • Jeremy Dibble • Peter Dickinson • Jed Distler • Adrian Edwards • Richard Fairman • David Fallows • David Fanning • Andrew Farach-Colton • Iain Fenlon • Neil Fisher • Fabrice Fitch • Jonathan Freeman-Attwood • Charlotte Gardner • David Gutman • Christian Hoskins • Lindsay Kemp • Philip Kennicott • Richard Lawrence • Andrew Mellor • Ivan Moody • Bryce Morrison • Hannah Nepilova • Jeremy Nicholas • Christopher Nickol • Geoffrey Norris • Richard Osborne • Stephen Plaistow • Mark Pullinger • Peter Quantrell • Guy Rickards • Malcolm Riley • Marc Rochester • Patrick Rucker • Edward Seckerson • Mark Seow • Hugo Shirley • Pwyll ap Siôn • Harriet Smith • David Patrick Stearns • David Threasher • David Vickers • John Warrack • Richard Whitehouse • Arnold Whittall • Richard Wigmore • William Yeoman

Gramophone, which has been serving the classical music world since 1923, is first and foremost a monthly review magazine, delivered today in both print and digital formats. It boasts an eminent and knowledgeable panel of experts, which reviews the full range of classical music recordings. Its reviews are completely independent. In addition to reviews, its interviews and features help readers to explore in greater depth the recordings that the magazine covers, as well as offer insight into the work of composers and performers. It is *the* magazine for the classical record collector, as well as for the enthusiast starting a voyage of discovery.

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Phone 020 7738 5454 **Fax** 020 7733 2325
email gramophone@markallengroup.com
EDITOR AND PUBLISHER Martin Cullingford
DEPUTY EDITOR Sarah Kirkup / 020 7501 6365
REVIEWS EDITOR Tim Parry / 020 7501 6367
ONLINE CONTENT EDITOR James McCarthy
SUB-EDITOR David Threasher / 020 7501 6370
SUB-EDITOR Marija Đurić Speare
ART DIRECTOR Dinah Lone / 020 7501 6689
PICTURE EDITOR Sunita Sharma-Gibson
AUDIO EDITOR Andrew Everard
EDITORIAL ADMINISTRATOR Libby McPhee
THANKS TO Hannah Nepilova and Charlotte Gardner
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF James Jolly

ADVERTISING

Phone 020 7738 5454 **Fax** 020 7733 2325
email gramophoneads@markallengroup.com
COMMERCIAL MANAGER
Esther Zuke / 020 7501 6368
SENIOR SALES EXECUTIVE
Gordana Jević / 020 7501 6373

SUBSCRIPTIONS AND BACK ISSUES

0800 137201 **(UK)** +44 (0)1722 716997 **(overseas)**
subscriptions@markallengroup.com

PUBLISHING

Phone 020 7738 5454
HEAD OF MARKETING AND DIGITAL STRATEGY Luca Da Rè / 020 7501 6362
MARKETING MANAGER
John Barnett / 020 7501 6233
MARKETING EXECUTIVE
Hayley Sigrist / 020 7738 6459
GROUP INSTITUTIONAL SALES MANAGER Jas Atwal
PRODUCTION DIRECTOR
Richard Hamshire / 01722 716997
PRODUCTION MANAGER Kyri Apostolou
CIRCULATION DIRECTOR
Sally Boettcher / 01722 716997
SUBSCRIPTIONS MANAGER
Bethany Foy / 01722 716997
EDITORIAL DIRECTOR Martin Cullingford
MANAGING DIRECTOR Paul Geoghegan
CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER Ben Allen
CHAIRMAN Mark Allen



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PIERS HELLAWELL

DELPHIAN

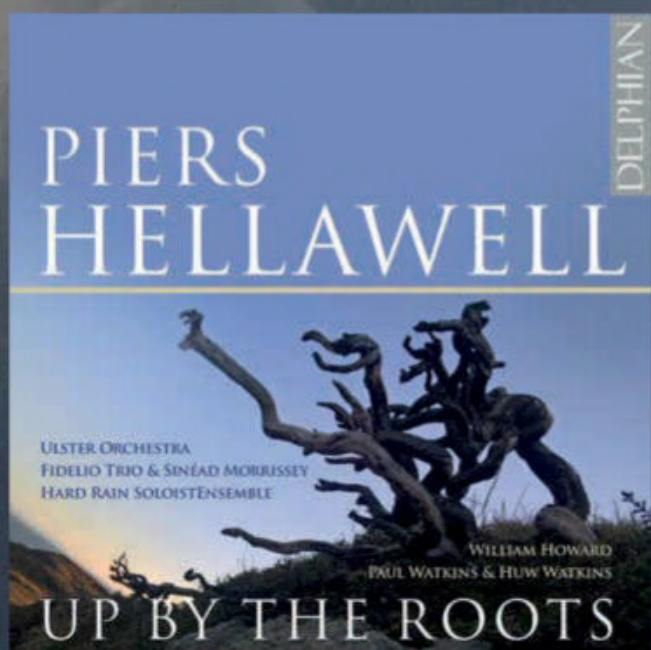
UP BY THE ROOTS

ULSTER ORCHESTRA
FIDELIO TRIO & SINÉAD MORRISSEY
HARD RAIN SOLOISTENSEMBLE

WILLIAM HOWARD
HUW WATKINS
PAUL WATKINS

"A rich kaleidoscope of inspired creativity ... this is music well worth getting to know"

The Scotsman
DCD34114



DCD34223

In a long and distinguished career, composer Piers Hellawell has produced a body of work characterised by boundless invention, genuine discovery and deep integrity.

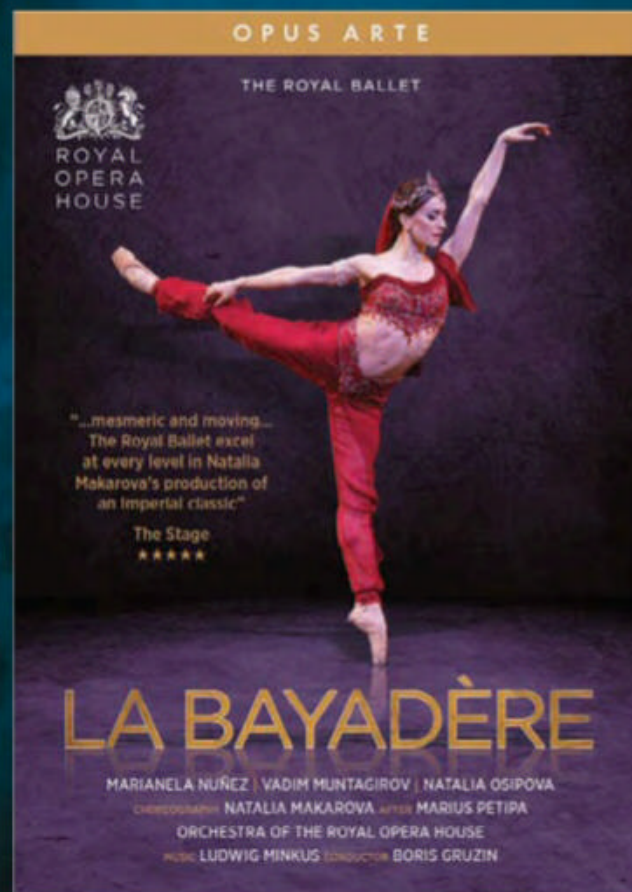
Here, with his second release on Delphian, his enduring creative partnerships – forged through nearly 40 years of composing – are reflected in music that combines arresting surface gestures and sounds with a powerful underlying vision, resulting in pieces that both encourage and reward repeated hearings.

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★★★★ The Guardian



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**1 CCS SA 19503 GRAMOPHONE EDITOR'S CHOICE**

Rachel Podger violin & Arte dei Suonatori |
A. Vivaldi – La Stravaganza | Allegro from
Concerto No. 12

2 CCS SA 24206 GRAMOPHONE EDITOR'S CHOICE

Matthew Wadsworth lute | Masters of the Lute |
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3 CCS SA 24806 GRAMOPHONE EDITOR'S CHOICE

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4 CCS SA 20604 GRAMOPHONE EDITOR'S CHOICE

Florilegium | G. Ph. Telemann – Paris Quartets,
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9 CCS SA 21604 GRAMOPHONE EDITOR'S CHOICE

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10 CCS SA 30010 GRAMOPHONE EDITOR'S CHOICE

Iván Fischer conductor & Budapest Festival Orchestra
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Andante con moto from Suite in A Minor

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H. I. F. von Biber – Passacaglia from Rosary Sonatas

12 CCS SA 38817 GRAMOPHONE EDITOR'S CHOICE

Iván Fischer conductor & Budapest Festival Orchestra
| G. Mahler – Symphony No. 3 |
Lustig im Tempo und keck im Ausdruck

13 CCS SA 21104 GRAMOPHONE EDITOR'S CHOICE

Ebony Band, Werner Herbers leader | Homenaje a
Revueltas | S. Revueltas – Sensemayá

CHANNEL CLASSICS

turns THIRTY

Home to artists such as Rachel Podger, Iván Fischer and Anna Fedorova, the label celebrates three decades of outstanding reviews with this month's cover SACD

It depends on the repertoire and the instrumentation which address I enter into the navigation in my van full of gear. It can be the home base hall of an orchestra, one of my favorite churches or a concert hall here in The Netherlands. Over the past 30 years I've travelled to England, Hungary, Germany, France, Estonia, Poland, Czechia, Denmark, USA, Switzerland, Sweden, Spain, even to Australia, China and Bolivia!

Fellow travellers along the production are my important partners of recording and editing equipment. Van den Hul, supporter of Channel for over 20 years now, is always coming up with an even better sounding cable. Grimm Audio with their superior analog to digital converters, and since three years their LS1 speakers that I use in the mastering room. Merging Technologies with their continuing support of DSD. And Sonopress has been producing excellent quality SACDs for almost 20 years of over 250 titles. Each of these partners continually strive for the best sound result possible. I am grateful for the continuous support of the press. Illustrative of this is the wonderful collaboration with *Gramophone*, whose reviewers have awarded no fewer than 43 Channel Classics recordings with an Editor's Choice over the years. Editor-in-Chief



Jared Sacks: the founder of Channel Classics

James Jolly selected 13 tracks for our 30th anniversary compilation album.

The fantastic Channel Classics team – Floor, Marian and Lydi – has been working together for many years to bring the recordings into the world. Their artwork, campaigns, ideas, commitment and their personal approach to artists, managements, distributors, designers, and all involved, is what makes it possible to share my recordings with you, and to put a spotlight on the artists!

Jared Sacks

Founder, producer, engineer
Channel Classics Records

www.channelclassics.com

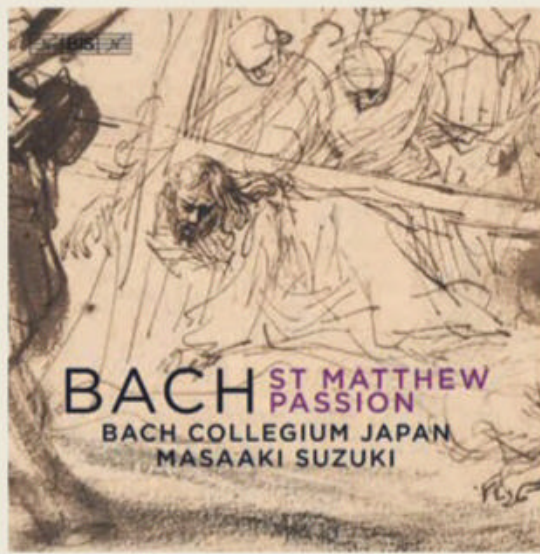
For 30 years, Channel Classics has been making wonderful recordings: from projects of a rare intimacy courtesy of Florilegium or Rachel Podger to the magnificent edifices that are Mahler's symphonies, authoritatively conducted by Iván Fischer. Many have caught our imagination, and a fair few have received our monthly Editor's Choice accolade. Here's a selection of some of our favourites.
James Jolly – Gramophone Editor-in-Chief

GRAMOPHONE *Editor's choice*

Martin Cullingford's pick of the finest recordings from this month's reviews



RECORDING OF THE MONTH



JS BACH

St Matthew Passion
Sols; Bach
Collegium Japan /
Masaaki Suzuki
BIS

► JONATHAN
FREEMAN-
ATTWOOD'S
REVIEW IS ON
PAGE 60

A supremely moving and eloquent performance of this most profound of works, drawing on the insight and instinct of conductor Masaaki Suzuki's lifetime of immersion in Bach's music.



SHOSTAKOVICH

Symphony No 13
Chicago Symphony
Orchestra / Riccardo Muti
CSO Resound
Riccardo Muti's

understanding of this score brings out its depths, a steady control strengthening the impact throughout; a live recording of an evidently powerful occasion.

► REVIEW ON PAGE 74



VASKS Piano Trios

Trio Palladio
Ondine
From the exquisite opening arrangement of *Lonely Angel* –

fragility and strength poignantly forged – to the drama and drive of *Episodi e Canto perpetuo*, this is a compelling insight into Vasks's musical world.

► REVIEW ON PAGE 82



'COMPLICES'

Jean-Guihen Queyras *vc*
Alexandre Tharaud *pf*
Harmonia Mundi
A brilliant example of how an album of

encores can – when performed with such style as by these perfectly matched soloists, and programmed so thoughtfully – become a captivatingly crafted through-listen.

► REVIEW ON PAGE 83



DEBUSSY. RAMEAU

Piano Works
Vikingur Ólafsson *pf*
DG
In our cover interview the superb pianist

Vikingur Ólafsson explains the thinking behind this album; the results are every bit as beguilingly rich in personality and colour as his two previous Editor's Choice albums.

► REVIEW ON PAGE 90

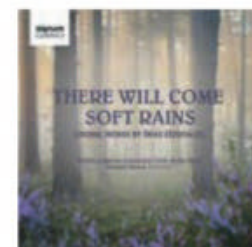


FEINBERG

Piano Sonatas Nos 1-6
Marc-André Hamelin *pf*
Hyperion
Samuil Feinberg was a great Russian pianist

perhaps best known for his Bach, but his compositions are less familiar. Marc-André Hamelin's overwhelming advocacy of these sonatas comes highly recommended.

► REVIEW ON PAGE 91



EŠĒNVALDS *There Will Come Soft Rains*
Pacific Lutheran Choir of the West / Richard Nance
Signum
The tender grace –

and sometimes drama – of Latvian composer Ēriks Ešēnvalds's music here meets a choir in very fine form indeed, caught in a rewardingly resonant acoustic.

► REVIEW ON PAGE 101



PARRY Judith
Sols; London Mozart
Players / William Vann
Chandos
That a recording – or even a revival – of

Parry's oratorio (from where the beloved Repton hymn tune originates) has taken until now seems additionally remarkable when one hears this delightful performance.

► REVIEW ON PAGE 104



'FADING'

The Gesualdo Six /
Owain Park
Hyperion
The third album from this young

and extraordinarily gifted group, led by composer Owain Park, is not only fascinatingly programmed but performed with exhilarating excellence.

► REVIEW ON PAGE 106



'BRILLEZ, ASTRES NOUVEAUX!'
Chantal Santon Jeffery
sop Orfeo Orchestra /
György Vashegyi
Aparté

A thrillingly diverse trip, emotionally and dramatically, through French Baroque opera (with excerpts from no fewer than 17 works), performed with captivating zeal.

► REVIEW ON PAGE 114



DVD/BLU-RAY

THOMAS Hamlet
Sols; Orchestre des Champs-Élysées /
Louis Langrée
Naxos
An alternative take on *Hamlet*, staged to mark the opera's 150th anniversary, and

starring some wonderful soloists.

► REVIEW ON PAGE 113



REISSUE/ARCHIVE 'A TRIBUTE TO YSAÏE'

Various artists
Fuga Libera

From Rob Cowan's box-set focus this month comes a fascinating tribute to the Belgian violinist and composer Eugène Ysaÿe from the Fuga Libera label.

► REVIEW ON PAGE 121

FOR THE RECORD

The much-loved soprano Mirella Freni has died

One of Herbert von Karajan's favourite singers has passed away at the age of 84. Italian soprano Mirella Freni died on February 7, aged 84. Like her almost exact contemporary and frequent musical partner Luciano Pavarotti (1935-2007), she was born in Modena (where she also died). At the age of 12 she appeared in a singing competition, tackling Puccini's 'Un bel dì'; she won but was advised by one of the judges, the great tenor Beniamino Gigli to take things slowly. She heeded his advice throughout her long career.

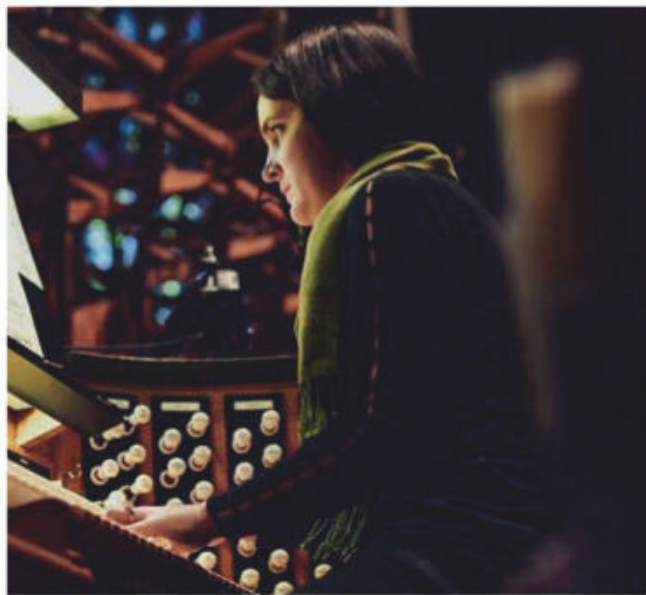
Freni recorded extensively for EMI, RCA, Decca, Philips and DG. Among her many honours were Italy's Cavaliere di Gran Croce and France's Légion d'honneur. *Gramophone* presented her with the Lifetime Achievement Award in 2002, on which occasion she joined the LSO and Sir Colin Davis at the Barbican to sing 'Dio pietoso' from Alfano's *Risurrezione*.

We pay full tribute to the wonderful Italian soprano on page 86, courtesy of this month's Icons feature by Richard Fairman.



Directorship for Rachel Mahon

Fresh from earning an Editor's Choice for her recording of Canadian organ music last month, Rachel Mahon has been promoted. Previously the Assistant Director, she is now the Director of Music at Coventry Cathedral, where the Delphian album was recorded.



Guðnadóttir wins an Oscar

Hildur Guðnadóttir, the Icelandic composer and cellist whose credits include the HBO series *Chernobyl*, is the recipient of an Oscar. She won this year's Academy Award for Best Original Score for the film *Joker*.

Hewitt's Fazioli piano broken

The Fazioli piano familiar to admirers of Angela Hewitt's numerous acclaimed albums was destroyed when it was dropped by piano movers following recording sessions of Beethoven variations in Berlin. The Fazioli F278 model had lived at Hewitt's Italian home and had been used for all her recordings made in Europe since 2003.

Find the Specialist Classical Chart at gramophone.co.uk

From this month, *Gramophone* is publishing the Specialist Classical Chart on its website, every week as soon as it has been announced.

Every Friday, you can find out which recordings are proving the most popular with the record-buying and streaming audience in the UK. The Specialist Classical Chart is compiled by the Official Charts Company, and only features albums released in the past 12 months (and which have not previously been available), and of which 100 per cent of the content is derived from classical repertoire.

As we go to press, Sheku Kanneh-Mason's well-received recording of Elgar's Cello Concerto, recorded with the LSO and Sir Simon Rattle and released by Decca, sits atop the charts (its eighth week in the table), while last month's Recording of the Month, Benjamin Grosvenor's Chopin concertos disc (also Decca), sits at Number 3. The previous month's Recording of the Month, 'Escapes – French Orchestral Works' from John Wilson and the Sinfonia of London on Chandos, is also still there, at Number 17.

But with places changing – and new entries – every week, log on to gramophone.co.uk or follow us on Facebook and Twitter for regular updates.



Presenting our free digital ballet special!

Gramophone is excited to have published its first digital ballet special, focusing on ballet on screen. The free digital magazine launched on Monday March 9 and has so far generated an overwhelmingly positive response, from readers and industry professionals alike.

Curated by Sarah Kirkup, Deputy Editor of *Gramophone*, 'Ballet on Screen' features nearly 20 expertly written reviews of ballet DVDs released in the past year, from classics such as the Bolshoi's *Coppélia* and the Royal Ballet's *Mayerling* to more contemporary fare such as Akram Khan's groundbreaking *Giselle* for English National Ballet and Norwegian Ballet's unique take on Ibsen.

'*Gramophone* has long been respected and renowned for the quality of its reviews of classical music, written by an esteemed panel immersed in the classical music world,' writes Sarah. 'We wanted to extend this approach to ballet DVDs, which is



why I asked some of the world's finest dance writers to contribute to this special publication.' It was also important, she says, to acknowledge in these reviews the pivotal role music has to play in the role of dance.

Elsewhere in the magazine, there are two features: one written by renowned dance critic Alastair Macaulay on Margot Fonteyn's legacy

on film, and one on the surging popularity of ballet at the cinema, including an interview with acclaimed ballet film director Ross MacGibbon. There are also news stories, competitions, performance listings, and an interview with newly appointed Director of Birmingham Royal Ballet Carlos Acosta. You can learn more about the content on offer and read it all for free by visiting gramophone.co.uk; and to hear about the project's overall vision, do tune in to our *Gramophone* podcast devoted to discussing the topic.

ONE TO WATCH

Chiara Skerath Soprano

The growing reputation of the Swiss-Belgian lyric soprano Chiara Skerath has been built largely on Mozartian repertoire: Zerlina in *Don Giovanni*, both Barbarina and Susanna in *Le nozze di Figaro*, Despina in *Così fan tutte*, Servilia in *La Clemenza di Tito*, Pamina in *Die Zauberflöte*, Ninetta in *La finta semplice* and Licenza in *Il sogno di Scipione* - the last of these on a Signum recording with Ian Page, which was shortlisted for a 2018 *Gramophone* Award. But Skerath's range goes far beyond Mozart, with repertoire extending from Gluck through Donizetti and Richard Strauss to the role of Eliza Doolittle in *My Fair Lady*. She also excels in French and German song, though we're yet to hear the fruits of this on record.

Our next chance to hear Skerath on disc is on the first volume of a new series called 'Sturm und Drang' from The Mozartists and, again, Ian Page - which will be reviewed in the next issue of *Gramophone*. Here she sings rare operatic arias by Niccolò Jommelli and Tommaso Traetta, as well as one by Haydn, all with her customary sense of narrative engagement. She really knows how to 'sell'



everything she sings; as Ian Page says: 'Chiara is an amazing force of nature. She's got fantastic presence, and is a wonderful artist, really dynamic and with a very positive spirit, which comes across in her singing - I think she's going to have an amazing future.' He continues: 'Obviously with The Mozartists she focuses on 18th-century repertoire, but there's no repertoire that doesn't suit her. She's a joy!'

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Recent episodes in our popular *Gramophone* Podcast series include violinist Jack Liebeck discussing his unusual coupling of the concertos by Brahms and Schoenberg, and fellow fiddler Johannes Pramsohler introducing the art of the 18th-century composer-violinist Pieter Hellendaal. Pianist Eric Lu, meanwhile, explains the programming of his debut solo album, and conductor Paavo Järvi talks about working with Tokyo's NHK Symphony Orchestra.



Don't miss Eric Lu on the Gramophone Podcast

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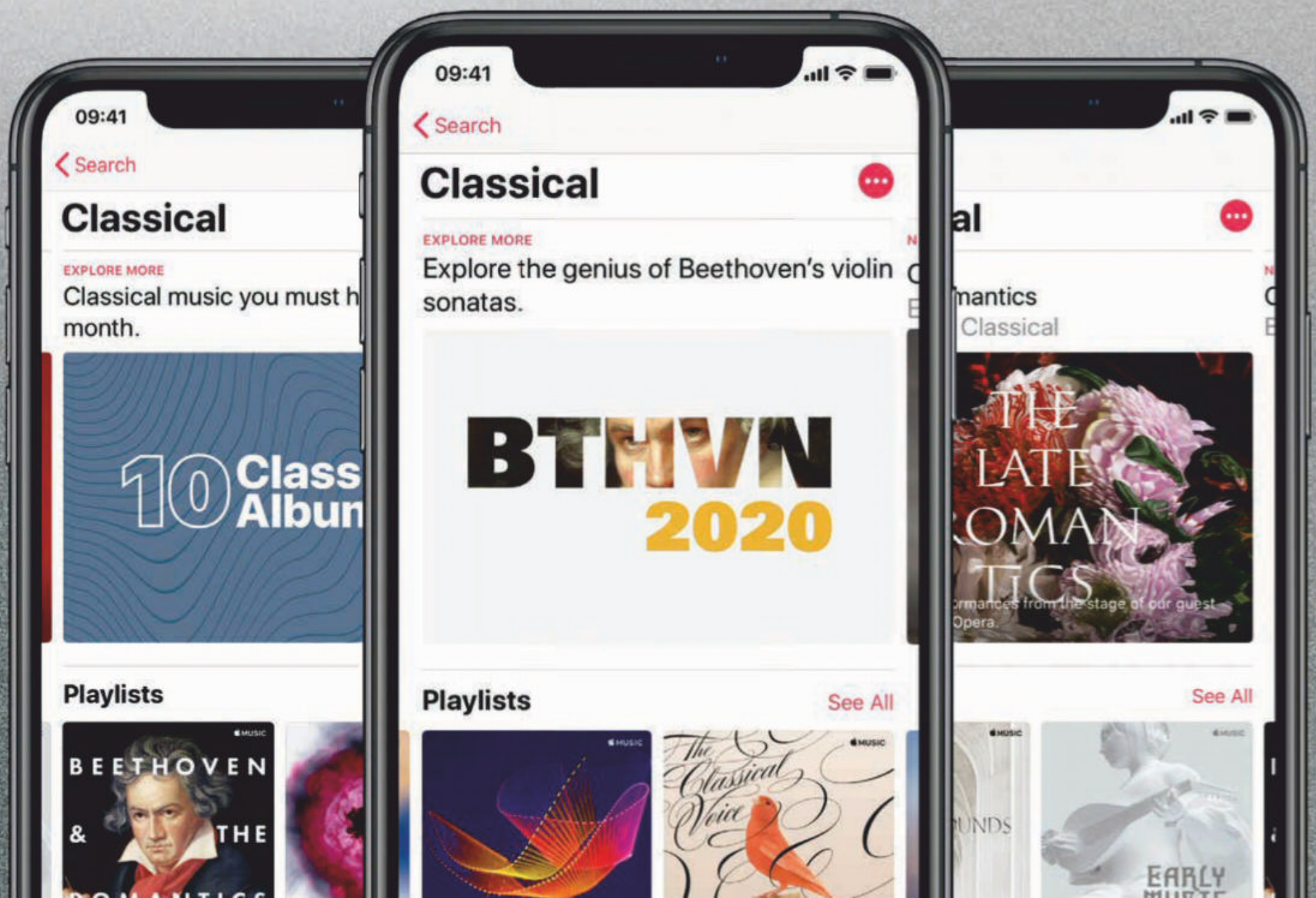
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GRAMOPHONE GUIDE TO ...

Minuet

Richard Wigmore traces the musical history of a popular dance form

The origins of the minuet – a stately dance in triple time – are blurred. Its name may derive from the French ‘menu’ (‘slender’), denoting the small, neat steps of the dance. By the 1660s the minuet was a must-have social skill at the court of Louis XIV. At balls couples were assessed by the assembled company as they moved through a series of choreographed steps. Lully further popularised the minuet in his ballets and operas.

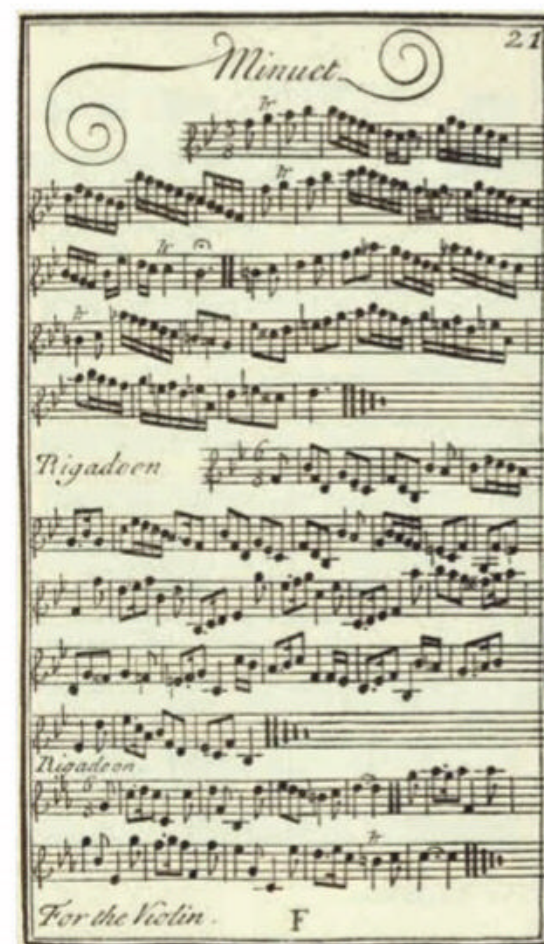
Like all things French, the minuet soon crossed boundaries. Its graceful rhythms and symmetrical phrases underlie some of Purcell’s most haunting songs, as in ‘Fairest Isle’ from *King Arthur*. In the next century, one or more minuets, often of a wistful cast, were de rigueur in the operas of Rameau.

South of the Alps, in the hands of Corelli and Alessandro Scarlatti, the minuet tended to be faster and lustier. Meanwhile it had become an optional ingredient in French and German keyboard suites. Handel adopted the faster, Italian-type minuet in his G major harpsichord suite. Bach, who could rarely resist contrapuntal elaboration in his minuets, used both types. The Lutheran cantor is at his most decorously Gallic in the minuets of the First *Brandenburg Concerto* and the B minor Flute Suite.

Alone among Baroque dances, the minuet survived into the age of Haydn and Mozart. Many JC Bach symphonies and several early Mozart concertos end with a gracious minuet. In Haydn’s C sharp minor Sonata, No 36, and Mozart’s Violin Sonata K304 the melancholy minuet finales double as surrogate slow movements.

From the 1770s most composers favoured the faster Italian form of the dance, often roughing it up in the process.

Anyone trying to dance the metrically skewed minuets in Haydn’s Quartet Op 20 No 4, or Mozart’s K387, would risk ending up in A&E. Canonic writing was a particular feature of minor-keyed minuets, as in Mozart’s Symphony No 40 or the abrasive ‘witches’ minuet’ of Haydn’s Quartet Op 76 No 2. Elsewhere in late Haydn, minuets become bucolic scherzos that leave their courtly French model gasping.



A minuet: typically ‘a stately dance in triple time’

Beethoven’s *menuetto* marking in his First Symphony fools no one. It’s an unbridled scherzo, setting the blueprint for the 19th century. When Beethoven (in his Eighth Symphony and Third *Razumovsky* Quartet) or Schubert (in his Octet and *Rosamunde* Quartet) wrote a true minuet, the effect is nostalgic or gently ironic. Ditto Brahms in his A minor String Quartet. A nostalgia for the French ‘golden age’ of Couperin and Rameau underpinned the minuet’s revival by Fauré, Debussy and Ravel. After World War One, in a spirit of ironic reminiscence the arch-serialist Schoenberg used minuets in his Op 24 Serenade and Op 25 Suite. 6

IN THE STUDIO

● The **Choirs of Jesus College Cambridge** were at Jesus College Chapel from March 15 to 18 to make the first commercial recordings of six works by the British composer Grayston Ives. The singers were joined by Britten Sinfonia to record the Requiem, the *Magnificat* and the *Nunc dimittis* from the *Warwick Service*, and four smaller choral works – including *The Red Dragonfly* for treble voices and piano accompaniment, which will be released as a bonus track. The recording, on Signum, is planned for release at the beginning of 2021.

● Alpha has a number of exciting recording projects coming up, not least a new album from **Patricia Kopatchinskaja** due out in March 2021. In a radical departure for the Moldovan musician, she is recording Schoenberg’s *Pierrot Lunaire* but not as a violinist. As she writes on her website, ‘I have always longed to do the speaker’s/singer’s part,’ and, following on from performances of this role in Utah in 2017 and Berlin last year, she recorded it in December alongside musicians from Camerata Bern. But she is playing the violin too, in Schoenberg’s *Phantasy* and Webern’s *Four Pieces*, both for violin and piano.

● A gargantuan recording on PHI is in the pipeline. Conducted by **Philippe Herreweghe**, the Collegium Vocale and the Orchestre des

Champs-Élysées have recently set down Bruckner’s Mass No 2 which, along with the *Te Deum* recorded in 2012, will be released in October.

● Mezzo-soprano **Karen Cargill** last month returned to the studio with her regular recital partner Simon Lepper for a programme of Chausson and Hahn. They were joined by guest soloists from the Royal Scottish National Orchestra for the Linn recording, to be released later this year.

● Again for Linn, *Gramophone* critic **Jonathan Freeman-Attwood** is heading to the recording studio on April 1-2 for an all-Mozart album for trumpet and piano. Part of his imaginative ‘musical reinventions’ series for this combination of instruments, the recording marks Freeman-Attwood’s first foray into the Classical period; previous recordings in the series have focused on reworkings of music from the Romantic and Baroque eras. The release date is yet to be confirmed.

● This month, the harpsichordist **Mahan Esfahani** is recording Bach’s Six Partitas at Wyastone Concert Hall. The release, on Hyperion, is set for April 2021. Also for Hyperion, the **Choir of Westminster Abbey** under James O’Donnell are recording Dove, Martin and Weir this month for a March 2021 release.

ORCHESTRA *Insight ...*

Swedish Chamber Orchestra

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Örebro is dominated by an imposing castle, but can otherwise feel like a nondescript town – one of many within commutable reach of Stockholm, with a generous cultural provision typical of Sweden that reassures its populace they need never leave while inducing a sense of underlying complacency in the process. In fact, Örebro is different, containing as it does not just another workhorse civic symphony orchestra but an ensemble with a plan, an identity, an international profile and a consistent presence in the pages of *Gramophone*.

The Swedish Chamber Orchestra was established in its current form in 1995 following years of unsatisfactory reorganisations, augmentations and mergers of various amateur and semi-professional ensembles with roots stretching back to the 1830s. Many eminent musicians had tried to make it work, notably the composer Ingvar Lidholm, but it was the streamlining of what had been an unsatisfactory Örebro Symphony Orchestra into an ensemble of just 39 players in the '90s that made this town's classical music provision viable, different and unique in Sweden.

In 1997, Thomas Dausgaard was appointed Chief Conductor and remained in the post for 22 years. Dausgaard had ambitious plans for the ensemble and knew they were best realised via recording. They started with Beethoven: a cycle of the complete

orchestral works. 'A dazzling and refreshing success' was one early verdict in these pages as Dausgaard's lithe, primary-coloured, predominantly modern-instrument set, of the symphonies at least, felt like a worthy successor to Harnoncourt's and prepared the ground for (among others) Douglas Boyd's.

Moving from Simax to BIS, the SCO took on Schumann, Schubert, Bruckner, Brahms, Dvořák, Tchaikovsky and even Wagner. Dausgaard set many examples, based not just on textural clarity and individual discipline but on the idea that an ensemble of this size 'makes for a different kind of excitement in the music-making'. It became possible, he said in 2017, 'to steer the music with even more freedom; to address the tiniest little thing'. He was speaking in the acoustically ideal Örebro Concert Hall, a building whose architectural transformation he spearheaded.

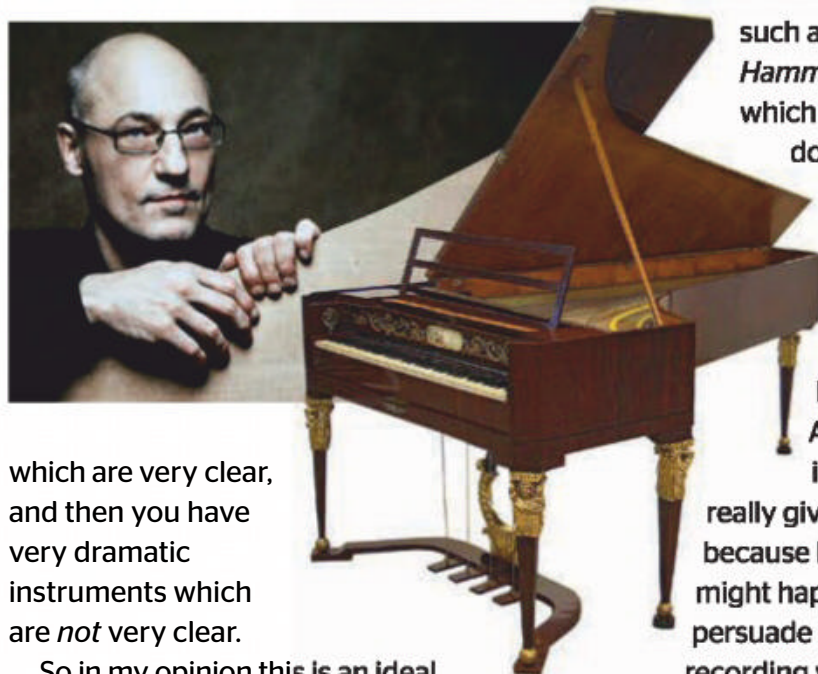
The SCO's work on record led it to the Salzburg Festival, the BBC Proms and Lincoln Center. It works regularly with Stockholm resident Andrew Manze, who has unlocked even more detail in focusing on Baroque and Classical repertoire. In 2019, Dausgaard was succeeded by the only sort of musician who could further enhance the one-for-all culture of the ensemble: a career chamber musician, Martin Fröst. **Andrew Mellor**

ARTISTS & *their* INSTRUMENTS

Andreas Staier on a restored 1810 Mathias Müller fortepiano

“Mathias Müller was a Viennese maker, though not one of the most famous – when Edwin Beunk showed me the instrument just after he had restored it some years ago I hadn't heard of his name. But now I think it's one of the finest Viennese instruments of the time I have ever come across, so it was a great pleasure to get to know this instrument. I thought a lot about what to use for this Beethoven recording [the three Op 31 Sonatas, Six Variations on an Original Theme, Op 34, and the *Eroica* Variations, Op 35] – I considered that Beethoven had an Érard from around 1805 and that there is a very good copy, but in the end I decided to go for this Viennese instrument.

I think it has an amazing clarity and transparency and, at the same time, a force and drama, and it's very rare to find these qualities together – you have instruments



which are very clear, and then you have very dramatic instruments which are *not* very clear.

So in my opinion this is an ideal instrument for middle-period Beethoven – even for Beethoven written towards the late period, though some of the very late pieces,

such as the *Diabelli* Variations or the *Hammerklavier*, require lower keys which this six-octave instrument doesn't have.

It's a wonderfully elegant instrument – from a purely aesthetic point, those instruments from the 1810s are the most elegant and beautiful. It's a pleasure to look at. As Edwin Beunk likes this instrument so much, he doesn't really give it out for big concert tours because he's too afraid that something might happen to it. That I could finally persuade him to give it to me for this recording was extremely nice of him!”

Andreas Staier's new Beethoven album, *'Ein neuer Weg'*, is available on Harmonia Mundi and will be reviewed next month

FROM WHERE I SIT

Edward Seckerson reflects on what makes the format of the live public interview flourish




As some readers may be aware, a significant proportion of my journalism these days is given over to a favourite format – the live public interview. As I write this column an exciting four days beckon during which I will share platforms with Antonio Pappano, John Tomlinson, and a brilliant young talent Keith Ramsay (Rachmaninov in the recent

London premiere of Dave Malloy's *Preludes*), the latter at Pizza Express Holborn where I curate a series featuring the brightest and best of musical theatre performers. Later in the year I am honoured to be hosting two events with the great Dame Janet Baker – at Champs Hill in Sussex and at the Ryedale Festival in her native Yorkshire. Her great friend and another great Dame – Patricia Routledge – continues to grace me with her company in our conversational show *Facing the Music*.

One of my enduring bugbears is the trendy label 'Q&A', seemingly used to describe any event in which two or more people converse publicly. But a decent interview is never just about questions and answers. Assuming the interviewer knows their stuff, assuming their research has been sufficiently diligent – and neither, it seems, can entirely be taken for granted – it should go without saying that lively debate will ensue. I once asked Dame Diana Rigg what she required of a director. 'Direction!' she replied. Good return. The ball was back in my court and my choice of shot needed to be judicious, smart and fast.

Over the years I have learned that 90 percent of the success of such events lies with the interviewer's ability to put their subjects at ease. Trust is a big part of that. Trust that the interviewer has indeed done their homework but, more than that, trust that they can demonstrate genuine kinship with the artist's work. And if the participants are at ease, then the audience will be too. And just as with any public performance that special 'compact' between audience and performers will create the desired atmosphere.

It's also something of a myth that the interviewer should effectively disappear in this process. I'm of the opinion that the business of interviewing is a performance art and that the presence and personality of the interviewer should significantly complement that of the interviewee. There's a bit of acting involved (my years as an actor were not wasted). In the case of Patricia Routledge and *Facing the Music* – a show chronicling her little-known work in musical theatre – the trick is to make something that we have performed many times, something that is set in almost every detail, play like a first outing.

As with reviewing for *Gramophone*, detail is everything. Pappano and I will be talking about Beethoven's vocal writing – awkward or borderline unsingable? – and the order of the inner movements of Mahler's Sixth (like me, he favours the original order of scherzo second); with Dame Janet I shall pry into her distinct coloration of the Mahler Rückert lied 'Ich bin der Welt abhanden gekommen', where her remote 'white' sound has been much imitated. A conscious or unconscious effect? Calculated or purely instinctive? All shall hopefully be revealed. 



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Painting pictures in sound

As Víkingur Ólafsson records his new album of Rameau and Debussy, Martin Cullingford offers a portrait of Gramophone's Artist of the Year at work

The road from Iceland's Keflavik Airport to its capital, Reykjavik, passes through dark fields of ancient lava. Every so often, silhouetted against a sky whose foreboding hue almost seems to draw its colour from the black rocks beneath, you pass what look eerily like statues of men. These *steinvarða*, or stone cairns, built as waymarkers for Icelanders, now appear to watch quietly over the elemental landscape with a detached observance. In big cities, people can delude themselves into thinking they are dominant and permanent. To be in a country like Iceland is to be brought starkly face to face with unfathomable geological timescales, a powerful reminder of the fragility of our own fleeting lives. It adds a unique intensity to what we can do, what we can experience – today, and now. Is it fanciful to believe we can hear in music something of the place in which it was created? It's something I ponder often during my time here watching Víkingur Ólafsson at work.

'I see all music as contemporary music – I don't make a distinction. We are reinventing Rameau's music when we play it today, so it is new music'

What always strikes me about this remarkable young pianist's playing is that everything he performs (be it Bach, Debussy or Philip Glass) feels somehow, and movingly, contemporary, of our own time, as if that's all it ever can be – as if it could thus be played no other way. In the booklet notes to Ólafsson's recent Bach album he wrote: 'We performers must weigh our knowledge of period style against our individual and inescapably contemporary sensibility.' And when that's acknowledged and accepted, what's left is a liberating freedom. 'I stick by those words,' he tells me when I quote them back to him. 'It's like my manifesto. I really feel that. I see all music as contemporary music, I don't make a distinction. If we play the music of Rameau today we play it inevitably so differently from the way it has sounded before – certainly in his time, when he had nothing close to the modern piano, and when the horse was the fastest means of transport. But because we are reinventing the music, obviously it is contemporary. It is new music.'

But we're getting ahead of ourselves. After the basalt expanses, the small and brightly coloured buildings of Reykjavik's centre greet you with a warm embrace, a fireside glow against the harsh world beyond. Nature never feels far away though. The city is dramatically set against the backdrop of its own mountain, Esja, looming just across the water from the harbour. And somehow uniting the two, thrusting out into the bay like a prehistoric promontory, is the beautiful Harpa – which houses Reykjavik's first purpose-built concert hall. Construction began just before the 2008 financial crisis which almost bankrupted the country, and now it stands as a striking symbol of a resurgent and newly confident country. The thick, glimmering glass of the main facade is the work of artist Olafur Eliasson, and to walk through its foyers and corridors is to experience an entrancing display of shifting sight lines and varying vistas.

If the Harpa Concert Hall is integral to the city's cultural life ('It's hard to imagine Reykjavik without it,' the pianist tells me), it's been equally so to the career of Ólafsson himself. The soloist in its opening concert in 2011, he even handpicked

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Kings & Queens of Opera

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Old and new in dialogue: outwardly apparent dichotomies melt away in the hands of Ólafsson, pictured here in Iceland's dark fields of ancient lava

the piano for the hall. And, appropriately enough, it's in this venue and on that very piano that he now records his albums for Deutsche Grammophon: 2018's fascinating survey of Bach pieces and arrangements, and 2017's album of Glass which lent the minimalist master's music a beguiling atmosphere. Both were Editor's Choices.

When I arrive, the sessions for Ólafsson's new album of music by Rameau and Debussy are already under way, in Harpa's second, smaller space. In an otherwise dark auditorium a Steinway sits in a pool of half-light cast by an old-school standard lamp, surrounded by an array of meticulously placed microphones.

Reykjavik may be home, but Ólafsson could record anywhere – so why here? 'It's a very specific sound. If you listen to my Glass and the Bach recordings, you will hear that sound. And it is a different sound. I love the sound. It is a very unusual room. It doesn't have chairs – it's more like a gym, almost. It has a hard floor. It has this incredible graphic clarity and then a kind of warmth – the two combined. This is what I love in a recorded sound because I'm not interested in just the graphic clarity if there's not this kind of generosity of warmth, and I hate nothing more than recordings that are too boomy; I just hate that because I lose all sense of personal expression with those recordings.'

If it ain't broke, don't fix it, as they say. The same applies to the piano. 'I know it inside out. It's a very specific piano. It's actually a really crazy piano to control – so the dynamics are like ... it's a wild instrument, but it is potentially extraordinarily sensitive, so you can get this breadth of tone that you can from few instruments. And that's what I appreciate about it so much.'

That said, a lot of time over the first sessions is spent taming the instrument, getting the tuning and regulation right. I can't imagine that the task is made any easier by the contrasting

repertoire of choice for his next album: Debussy, with his diffuse lines of watery colours, and Rameau, written for the immediate action of the harpsichord. But, given Ólafsson's belief that all music is contemporary music, such a division between early and modern is perhaps irrelevant.

'What I want to show with this album is Rameau as the futurist that he certainly was, the *enfant terrible* of the French Baroque, the guy who was the Debussy of his generation, the guy who created new language and broke the rules and set the tone. And I want to show Debussy not like we usually think of him, in this general way of Impressionism (whatever that term even means) – I don't think of the Monet waterlilies or whatever you think of with Impressionist art, I think of Debussy and his deep roots in the Baroque. And that's what I'm showing on this album. I chose the pieces very specifically to reflect that. Debussy was absolutely fascinated by Rameau, he loved him more than anything, and on the album there is the second piece from Debussy's *Images* Book 1, which is called "Hommage à Rameau". There is such a strong thread between them and such a French way of going about it. Rameau writes those pieces with incredible titles: "The tender complaints", "The dialogue of the muses", "The village girl". All these things are basically titles which are so similar to what Debussy would do with "The girl with the flaxen hair" or "Footsteps in the snow" from the *Préludes*; "Gardens in the rain" from *Estampes*. What they're doing is really painting pictures in sound. Debussy wasn't the first, Rameau was already doing this, and I want this album to be like a very seamless conversation between two friends. Even if one never met the other. And I want it to be as if you hardly know who is speaking.'

The programme was painstakingly prepared over six months, Ólafsson exploring how all the pieces lead into one another, in terms of both themes and tonality. 'I played through the entire



'It's hard to imagine Reykjavik without it': Ólafsson has a strong personal relationship with Iceland's eye-catching Harpa Concert Hall

works of Debussy and Rameau at home,' he recalls, 'I didn't skip a piece. Some of it I'd already studied, and much of the Debussy I'd played before – but the Rameau was such a discovery for me. I looked into the catalogue to see what had been recorded on the piano: so little of it, which is incredible as I consider Rameau after Bach the greatest keyboard composer of the Baroque era, and one of the most poetic composers of all time. It's incredible that everyone is playing the same Scarlatti sonatas, and the same 20 – maybe 30 – per cent of the Bach repertoire; but why has nobody been looking into Rameau? And it's not just niche interesting things, this music – it is greatness. I love the idea of making people hear something as if they're hearing it for the first time, or making them actually hear something for the first time. I'm sure that many people who hear the album will never before have heard some of this Rameau repertoire. Maybe they'll have heard two or three of the most famous ones, but much of it they will not have heard, I'm sure.'

Watching an artist record offers a fascinating insight into them as music-maker shorn of the expectations a public concert brings. It can be like sitting in on a laboratory, where magnificence and mistakes meet with extraordinary creativity, the microphone as catalyst. For some, it is an art form in itself: Ólafsson is one of those artists.

'I so often think about this,' he says. 'It's comparable to the difference between being a theatre actor and a film actor. When

we are taught to perform on stage, we are trained to play for the very last row of – in our student dreams – Carnegie Hall, or something like that. You have to project, you have to tell that story to a person 100 metres away. And it's the same in a theatre. But act the same way in film as you do in theatre and you just look ridiculous, absolutely exaggerated. The same goes

for making music for the microphone that is half a metre, or one metre, away.' He later reflects that learning how to play for a microphone didn't feature at all in his conservatoire training. 'The

art of recording can be, for me, the most personal form of expression. You can get this insanely intimate glimpse into the way people think about music.'

Right now, Ólafsson is recording several pieces from Rameau's Harpsichord Suite in G – 'La poule' with its light-hearted comedy, 'Les sauvages' with its engaging rhythms, and then the finger-twisting complexities of 'L'égyptienne'. The last occupies a long segment of the session, as Ólafsson attempts to get the tempo and, particularly, the trills exactly as he'd like them to be. It's a fascinating, tough, intense – even tense – time, full of listen-backs and retakes, opinions on approach formed throughout; it's a virtuoso forensic exploration of a fairly fiendish work. My hands hurt simply watching it. And yet it is not after finishing that work, but rather after finishing the next one on the schedule, 'L'enharmonique' (a beautifully fluid and poetic piece, which he records in one take), that Ólafsson finally sits back expressing himself to be utterly exhausted. It's the intensity of the held-back, the held-in, a slowly exhaled emotion – rather than

'I played through their entire works. Much of the Debussy I'd played before, but the Rameau was such a discovery'

technical virtuosity – which leaves him drained. When I ask him about this later, his reply is something to the effect that virtuosity may be physically exhausting, but deeply intense slowness is simply all-consuming.

Ólafsson's love of recording owes a unique debt to his Icelandic childhood. 'I think it has something to do with the fact that my exposure to music was limited growing up here in the 1990s. It was very different from how it is now, and it certainly wasn't as easy to fly abroad, either. If I were growing up right now my dad would probably just fly me to London or wherever to see whatever I wanted to see. But that wasn't the case then, and so I became a huge CD collector. And I didn't do any competitions – that was very far away from my mentality, and so I didn't have any exposure to what students my age were doing. I had no yardstick to measure myself against except through recordings.' He cites Evgeny Kissin and Glenn Gould as early obsessions, followed by musicians of an older generation – Edwin Fisher, Benno Moiseiwitsch, Josef Hofmann, Clara Haskil, Dinu Lipatti, Emil Gilels (whose legendary recording of Rameau's 'Le rappel des oiseaux' was Ólafsson's first encounter with the composer's keyboard music) and the young Vladimir Horowitz. 'I think all the ones that I love are masters of sound. They're hugely different individuals, but they have something in common which is that they layer things, they create this dimension in the piano sound which is, really, the only way that a piano can sound beautiful in my opinion.'

As he himself recognises, Ólafsson is, in one sense, the last of a generation. Apart from the changes to Iceland, the changes to technology make his formative musical experience very different from that of people even just a few years younger than him. 'I am part of the last generation who remember a time before the internet. You would never listen to music online at all. There was no way of going on YouTube and seeing all the Russian and Chinese and American prodigies playing the Chopin *études* at the age of four or five (always younger and younger!). So there was a certain freedom growing up in Iceland. I'm not sure it is there anymore, anywhere – I think that freedom might have been taken away from us a little bit.' In contrast, he says, 'I had my own little musical world. And my own musical friends in the form of Kissin, Cortot, Gilels, Lipatti – they became my musical companions, and I guess I had to find my own musical path. I didn't go abroad to study until I was 16 – the first time I ever saw other music students my age. That was the same year I played the Tchaikovsky for my debut here with the Iceland Symphony Orchestra, so I was not too bad! But when I look back, I think it's remarkable how long I was without that exposure.'



Artist of the Year 2019: Ólafsson holds up his Gramophone Award

'All the pianists I love are masters of sound – hugely different individuals but with one thing in common: they layer things'

few moments of cheerful conversation, then courteously moves her on with the gracious skill of a diplomat.

With the sunlight now streaming with dazzling glare through Eliasson's glass facade, and the recording now safely in the can, retakes finished and patches made, the intensity of the last few days seems lifted, the mood now lighter. And as

we wrap up and I take my leave, I ask if he was ever happy with those trills in 'L'égyptienne' in the end. 'Absolutely, they completely work now. But that is what it is to make a recording like

that. You go to the edge of what is possible in a way, taking it as far as possible. You have to have this insanely strong sense of ideal before you come into the studio. But the paradox is that you have to have your ideal, but you also have to have the flexibility to then rethink things.'

The next time we meet, a month or so later, we're in London at the *Gramophone* Classical Music Awards ceremony, at which Ólafsson is named our Artist of the Year in recognition of his invigorating contribution to today's musical life. Here, in a congested and chaotic city, at a glamorous black-tie event, the quiet focus and powerful intensity of Harpa's half-lit hall feels like a world away. In many ways it is. But talk of the sessions begins to bridge that chasm: he tells me he's been working on the edits and would like to share some of them with me. But it was when he took to the stage to perform that the chasm was truly bridged. The roomful of a few hundred gathered guests falls almost as silent as that Harpa studio had been just a few weeks earlier, and those same degrees of contemporary colour emerge from music written centuries before. London and Iceland, past and present, all become one. **G**

Ólafsson's recording of Rameau and Debussy is reviewed on page 90



Not the usual SUSPECTS

With Beethoven recordings, it's often the same – justifiably famous – ones that regularly get recommended. We asked **Rob Cowan** to point us towards others – some of the most inspired and inspiring interpretations you probably haven't heard simply because they fell under the radar

First, I'll tell you what this piece isn't. 'Beethoven's greatest works'? No, there are too many masterpieces missing for that. 'The greatest recordings available'? Definitely not that, either. My idea is to sidestep the rightly vaunted Beethoven celebrities (Claudio Arrau, Daniel Barenboim, Leonard Bernstein, Alfred Brendel, Wilhelm Furtwängler, Herbert von Karajan, Wilhelm Kempff, Otto Klemperer, Stephen Kovacevich, Kurt Masur, Roger Norrington, Artur Schnabel, Georg Solti, Arturo Toscanini and so on) and opt instead for names that may have yet to enter your household as Beethoven library fixtures. And there are so many to choose from. Here is a mere sampling, and a pretty personal one at that.

It's a sad fact of commercial life that the press barely has the chance to assess new releases in relation to what is already available. The most sensible attitude is to give them time to settle, then size them up in relation to the tried and tested. You'll be amazed how often a not-so-big name faces and triumphs over a much-revered Goliath. Time and again I've thought myself well disposed towards a 'major' artist only to be disappointed by a particular reading, which is why nowadays I tend not to favour performers but assess performances in their own right. As far as I know, the recordings discussed here are available either singly or as part of a box-set, often also to stream. Pick a favourite work and test the waters for yourself. You may be pleasantly surprised.

Symphony No 1

Beethoven's cycle of nine symphonies is, for most music lovers, essential daily nourishment. In No 1, the Czech Philharmonic under Paul Kletzki, as recorded in 1968, presents the aural equivalent of 'Bohemia's woods and fields'. Time and again you notice how the delicious Czech Phil woodwind insist themselves onto the canvas, chirruping away, while the strings are razor-sharp in their precision (especially in the finale, once into their stride) and the whole band generates enlivening levels of pooled energy. I'd call this fresh, open-air Beethoven. Of Kletzki's whole cycle, the first two symphonies are especially good, though the entire thing – which is very well recorded for the period – has many rich ingredients to its credit.

● Czech PO / Paul Kletzki (Supraphon, 12/69)

Symphony No 3, 'Eroica'

Period-performance recordings of the symphonies usually switch to the fast lane, with nifty tempos, transparent textures and a reluctance to bend the musical line. Frans Brüggen's second cycle with the Orchestra of the Eighteenth Century (his first was for Philips), recorded live in 2011, is the exception that proves the rule. In the *Eroica* he opts for slower-than-usual tempos, maximum flexibility, a dark overall timbre and impressive depth of tone. The first movement (with repeat) builds as it might have done under Furtwängler or Klemperer, and the 'Marcia funebre' is filled with a vivid sense of pathos. It's ideal for listeners who love old instruments but find their usual manner of employment tiresome.

● Orchestra of the Eighteenth Century / Frans Brüggen (Glossa, 1/13)

Symphony No 4

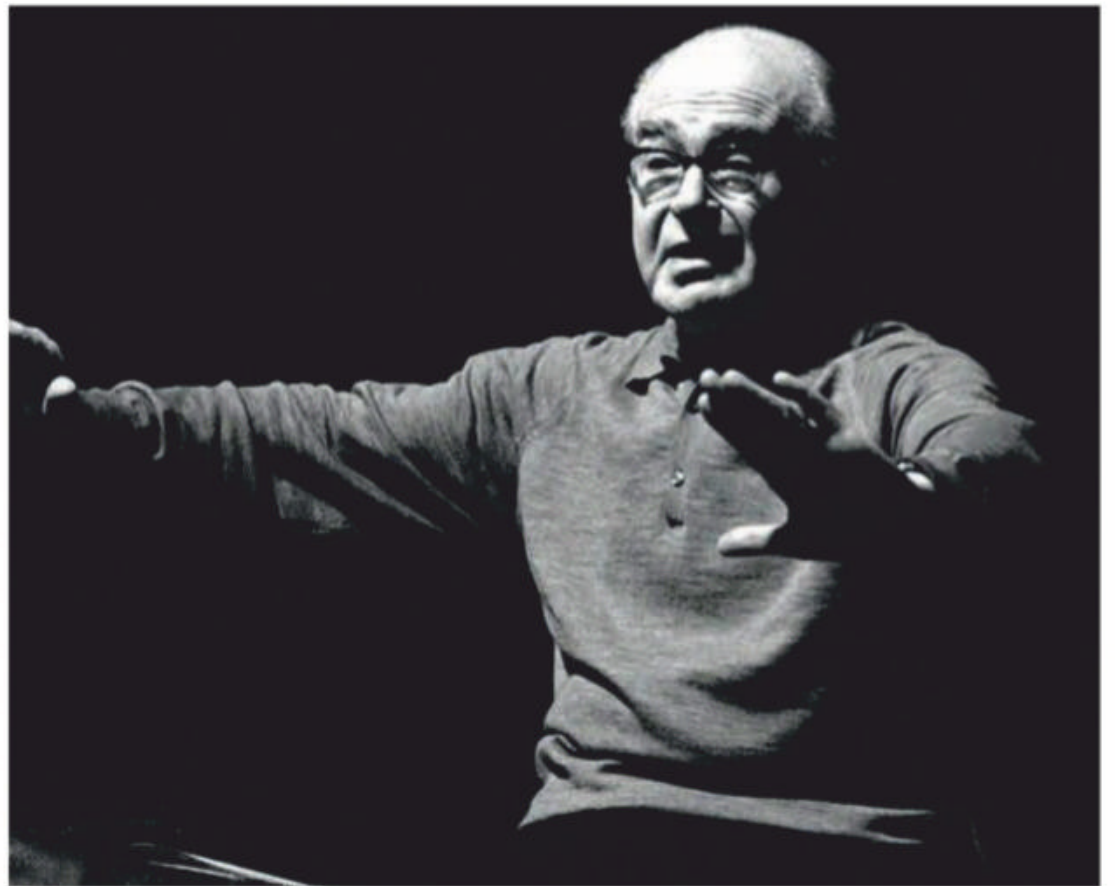
Prior to my hearing Pablo Casals and London Collegium Musicum in this 1959 recording, the top maestro for ushering the darkness of the Fourth Symphony's *Adagio* opening into a sunlit *Allegro vivace* was Furtwängler in wartime Berlin. But Casals's approach is even more dramatic, with a degree of space that is barely sustainable (though Casals manages to hold the line without allowing it to flag), a mysterious broadening at the centre of the movement, a beautifully drawn account of the second-movement *Adagio*, a rumbustious Menuetto and a brilliant finale. As ever with Casals, the playing has a real punch to it and although the sound isn't always ideally clear it's good enough to convey the basis of a great performance.

● London Collegium Musicum / Pablo Casals (Music & Arts)

Symphony No 5

With Beethoven's Fifth, I'm constantly drawn back to the Mercury version by the LSO under Antal Dorati, recorded in 1962. Why? Because this is a performance without frills or affectations, as muscular and rhythmically assertive as you'll find anywhere, with gutsy double basses in the Scherzo that in my experience have few, if any, equals on disc ('Living Presence' sound helps, of course). Dorati gives you a Beethoven Fifth that's both direct and uplifting, expressive too – and with integrity to spare. Whenever I hear it (and I've heard it many times), it's as if the ink of Beethoven's score is still wet on the page.

● London Symphony Orchestra / Antal Dorati (Mercury)



Paul Kletzki's First Symphony is just one gem amid a whole cycle worthy of exploration

Symphony No 6, 'Pastoral'

Emmanuel Krivine's 2010 period-instrument *Pastoral* fits the expected historically informed performance template, but with a difference: here, colour and character abound. The opening does indeed 'awaken happy feelings', like a gambolling lamb drunk on morning sunlight, whereas the 'Scene by the Brook' is disarmingly gentle (check out the flute from 3'57"). The horns pipe merrily for the gathering country folk, and when it comes to the rhythmically driven storm, the timps (with the expected hard sticks) deliver mightily rolling thwacks, which makes the feelings of thankfulness that follow doubly gratifying. This is a virtual reality *Pastoral*, with varied weathers that are vivid enough to be imminent.

● La Chambre Philharmonique / Emmanuel Krivine (Naïve, 7/11)

Symphony No 9, 'Choral'

It seems the *Choral* Symphony's interpretative options have, over the years, forged a fork in the road somewhere between Toscanini's clear-headed athleticism and Furtwängler's more broadly paced flights of mysterious fancy. In 1952, Eugen Jochum and his young Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra (and Chorus) teamed up with a quartet of soloists spearheaded from the bass end by Ferdinand Frantz (who offers surely the best 'O Freunde, nicht diese Töne!' ever) and recorded a decidedly Furtwänglerian *Choral*, with some markedly slow tempos, though more keenly inflected than his great predecessor's performances tended to be. I'd rate this as being among the most visionary Ninths available.

● Clara Ebers *sop* Gertrude Pitzinger *contr* Walther Ludwig *ten* Ferdinand Frantz *bass-bar* Bavarian Radio Chorus and Symphony Orchestra / Eugen Jochum (DG, 10/57)

Violin Concerto

In many key respects, modern approaches to the Violin Concerto have picked up where the Polish virtuoso Bronisław Huberman left off in 1934. Just compare his timing for the first movement (21'10") to, say, Christian Tetzlaff last year (22'45").

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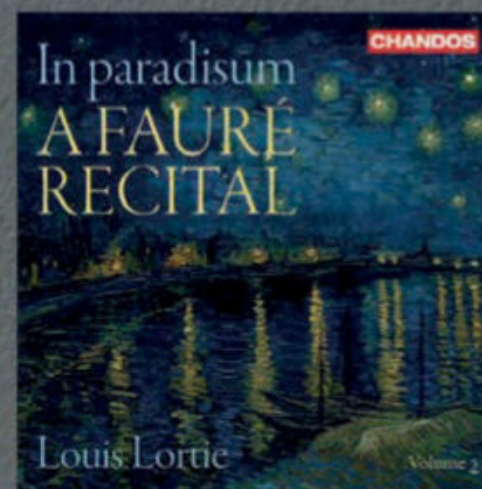


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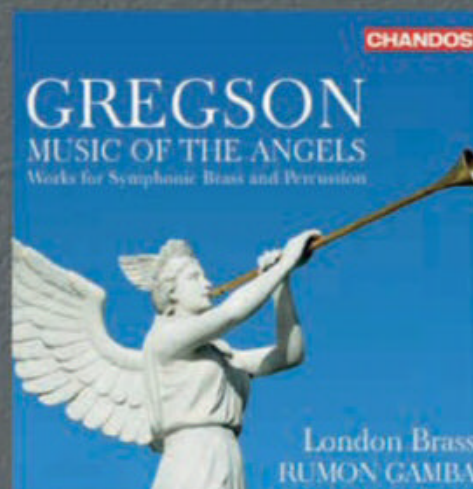
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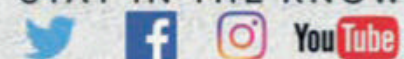
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Huberman's first entry boldly rockets us into the ether, his tone throughout is either silvery or acerbic, and his handling of Joachim's outspoken cadenza is confrontational. Yet there's warmth aplenty in the *Larghetto* and the closing Rondo is happily ebullient. It's interesting that this was George Szell's only commercial recording of the piece. His pert Viennese accompaniment could hardly have been more consistently on the ball.

● Bronisław Huberman *vn* Vienna Philharmonic / George Szell
(Warner Classics, 8/36)

Piano Concerto No 5, 'Emperor'

When it comes to choices for the *Emperor* Concerto there is one version that keeps insisting itself into my memory. The pianist, Mindru Katz, actually died on stage while playing Beethoven (a sonata). That was back in 1978, and he was just 52 years old. It's his recording of the work, made at Manchester's Free Trade Hall in 1959, that for me best encapsulates the grand, excited, affirmative and perennially fresh spirit of the music. As to the orchestral score, I doubt that the Hallé Orchestra under Sir John Barbirolli ever made a more vital Beethoven recording than this. It's as if all and sundry are literally shouting the music from the rooftops.

● Mindru Katz *pf* Hallé Orchestra / John Barbirolli
(Barbirolli Society, 7/59)

Triple Concerto

The Triple Concerto is in essence fleshed-out chamber music, which is why the admittedly handsome Oistrakh–Rostropovich–Richter–BPO–Karajan version (Warner Classics) tends to misfire. In their 2018 recording, Laurence Equilbey and her



HIP with a difference: Emmanuel Krivine conducts a virtual reality Pastoral Symphony



Away from his cello chair, Pablo Casals conducts a mean Symphony No 4

lissom team opt for a lighter, more dynamic, more muscular and – where needs be – more intimate approach. Full *forte* chords really register (the timps are magnificently present), both string players make colour a priority while pianist David Kadouch is extremely nimble and the chosen tempos are ideal throughout. This is 'feel-good' Beethoven, light years removed from the scowling revolutionary, and even more pastoral than the *Pastoral* Symphony itself. It's no good trying to turn it into what it isn't.

● Alexandra Conunova *vn* Natalie Klein *vc* David Kadouch *pf*
Insula Orchestra / Laurence Equilbey (Erato, 5/19)

String Quartet No 14, Op 131

You might say that the opening fugal *Adagio ma non troppo e molto espressivo* of Beethoven's C sharp minor String Quartet revolutionised the quartet medium as much as Wagner's Tristan chord altered the course of orchestral music. Both usher us among loaded shadows, but with Beethoven the eventual transformation to *allegro* signals a breaking dawn. And while the Busch, Budapest and Juilliard quartets focus most aspects of this wonderful music virtually to perfection, the Vlach Quartet's candid approach (in 1960) – so vibrantly emotional and yet so controlled – perhaps provides the ideal boarding point for the uninitiated. The variation movement becomes an ever-changing prism, the scherzo is full of mischief and the finale vividly suggests the strutting, square-jawed master in full creative flight.

● Vlach Quartet (Supraphon, 8/62)

String Quartet No 15, Op 132

Although great beyond measure, Beethoven's late quartets are problematic in that their ethereal nature makes them peculiarly difficult to grasp, even in the most inspired performances. The beauty of this 1951 recording of Op 132 by the Vienna Konzerthaus Quartet is that a sense of spiritual levitation (such as you experience in the 'thanksgiving' episodes in the *Molto adagio*) is never indulged at the expense of the music's overall

structure. The second movement's musette-like middle section is charming, and the last two movements, a bracing march and an impassioned *allegro*, suggest a decisive sense of closure. It's the solidity of this performance that most appeals, allied to its intensity and Viennese warmth.

● Vienna Konzerthaus Quartet

(Scribendum, 5/18)

Grosse Fuge (arr Gielen)

Michael Gielen was best known for his probing accounts of modern music. In the classics, that same level of creative intuition (Gielen was himself an accomplished composer) encouraged you, the listener, to freshly re-evaluate whatever you were hearing. For his version of Beethoven's *Grosse Fuge* (a work that Stravinsky once described as 'an absolutely contemporary piece of music that will be contemporary forever...'), Gielen's implied point is that if you're going to make chamber music symphonic, you must make it sound symphonic. Rarely has this intellectually challenging monolith been greeted with so many varieties of attack and articulation, as novel as they are fascinating. This 1993 recording will hold you in thrall, I guarantee.

● SWR SO Baden-Baden and Freiburg / Michael Gielen

(Hänssler Classic, 11/02)

Quintet for Piano and Winds

Beethoven's delightful Op 16 is available either for piano and winds (a quintet, as here) or as a quartet for piano and strings. Friedrich Gulda and his Vienna Philharmonic colleagues (recorded in 1960) achieve a perfect tonal blend, warm yet with a refreshing edge to the sound; and the performance is elegant, graceful and extremely well drilled. The outer movements are both marked *Allegro ma non troppo*, which – if the performers are sympathetic – confirms the music's genial mood. The lovely central *Andante cantabile* finds these attentive performers ideally responsive. Altogether, this is a joy to listen to, and the coupled Mozart quintet (K452) is just as good.

● Friedrich Gulda *pf* Vienna Philharmonic Wind Ensemble (DG, 3/61)

Violin Sonata No 9, 'Kreutzer'

The fabled partnership of Zino Francescatti and Robert Casadesus recorded the *Kreutzer* Sonata twice for CBS: once in New York in 1949 (mono) then in Paris in 1958 (stereo). Both versions are included in the large Casadesus box-set released by Sony Classical last year. The later version, although conceptually compelling, finds Francescatti's febrile tone and nervy vibrato just a little overbearing, while the sound brings Casadesus's contribution too much to the fore. By contrast, the earlier version is better balanced as well as more nuanced as an interpretation, with numerous subtleties from both players. There's no first-movement repeat (on either version), but such is the intensity – and brilliance – of the playing, that everything registers first time round.

● Zino Francescatti *vn* Robert Casadesus *pf* (Sony Classical, 9/54)



'So vibrantly emotional and yet so controlled': a wonderful String Quartet No 14 from the Vlach Quartet

Cello Sonata No 5

Daniil Shafran commanded the widest range of colours and dynamics of any cellist in living memory (I was lucky enough to have caught his last London recital, an event largely facilitated by Steven Isserlis). His 1971 set of the Beethoven sonatas with Anton Ginsburg says it all, especially the great last sonata: whether he's murmuring quietly, parading that signature fulsome vibrato (especially when on the attack), blissfully singing (try from 5'25" into the first movement), darkening his tone for the *Adagio con molto sentimento d'affetto* or edging craftily into the closing *Allegro fugato* – a marvellous effect. Ginsburg proves an ideal duo partner and the recording reports a truthful balance between the two players.

● Daniil Shafran *vc* Anton Ginsburg *pf* (Melodiya, 6/16)

Piano Sonata No 8, 'Pathétique'

Many years ago when I used to visit London market stalls in search of classical 78s (principally piano records by Friedman, Rosenthal, Horowitz, Rachmaninov and the like), I chanced upon a 1926 version of the *Pathétique* Sonata by one William Murdoch, who on further exploration turned out to be an Australian pianist, composer and author. What I didn't know as I ferried my bundle of discs back home was that I'd just purchased the most exciting version of the *Pathétique* Sonata ever recorded (a claim that still holds), with the first-movement *Allegro di molto e con brio* ferocious in its attack (with pitch-black *Grave* passages for contrast), an earnestly poetic *Adagio cantabile* and a spirited closing Rondo.

● William Murdoch *pf* (APR, A/19)

Piano Sonata No 17, 'Tempest'

Regarding his Piano Sonata No 17, Beethoven is reputed to have said to his close friend Anton Schindler, 'If you want to

know what the music means, read Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. Its opening movement features violently contrasting dynamics and tempos as well as two passages of recitative which are deliberately blurred through the use of the sustaining pedal. But it's the finale that's perhaps the most remarkable aspect of this 1927-28 recording by the Glasgow-born Liszt pupil Frederic Lamond, who even as late as 1945 (when he was in his mid-seventies) was still being billed as 'the greatest living exponent of Beethoven'. The playing here, so relaxed and yet so full of character, draws me back time and again.

● Frederic Lamond *pf* (APR, 8/30)

Piano Sonata No 29, 'Hammerklavier'

Maria Grinberg was the first Soviet pianist to record all 32 Beethoven sonatas. Grinberg, like so many of her musician-compatriots, had born the weight of personal tragedy: both her husband and her father were arrested and executed as 'enemies of the people'. But she rallied on in spite of this, her playing always forceful and intellectually compelling, and never more so than in the *Hammerklavier* Sonata (1966), where in addition to parading the necessary pianistic brawn she draws virtually as much poetry from the *Adagio sostenuto* as does Schnabel on his famous pre-war HMV recording. The flexibility of her reading is remarkable.

● Maria Grinberg *pf* (Melodiya/Scribendum, 4/13)

Diabelli Variations

How do you interpret a work that is so jam-packed with invention that there seems little room to supplement Beethoven's dazzling array of ideas with interpretative ideas of your own? In his 1952 recording, pianist Paul Baumgartner opts to tell it as it is, journeying from one variation to the next with absolute naturalness – be it from the fast opening theme to the *Alla marcia maestoso* that follows, from the galloping Variation 15 to the boogie-like Var 16 or the humbling sequence of three variations that brings the work to its close, leading us to a vast precipice before Beethoven summarily dispatches us with an elegant minuet and a 19th-century equivalent of 'that's all folks'. If ever genius was made manifest in music, it's here.

● Paul Baumgartner *pf* (DG, 9/17)

Missa solemnis

Next to the *Grosse fuge* and the *Diabelli* Variations, the *Missa solemnis* has to rate as being among the greatest of Beethoven's stand-alone masterpieces (that is, those that are not part of a cycle). Rather than suggesting a specific place of worship, the *Missa solemnis* brings prayer and thanksgiving into the open air, where towards the end of the *Agnus Dei* even auguries of battle are audible. Had Furtwängler recorded the work, I've a feeling that his viewpoint would have tallied with Rafael Kubelík's from 1977 – with its mastery of transitions, humbling sense of scale and engagement with that unnameable 'something' that even the non-believer might feel in the face of such an overwhelming listening experience.

● Helen Donath *sop* Brigitte Fassbaender *mez*

Peter Schreier *ten* John Shirley-Quirk *bass-bar*

Bavarian Radio Symphony Chorus and Orchestra / Rafael Kubelík (Orfeo, 8/19)

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A century in Salzburg

Richard Osborne looks back over 100 years of the Salzburg Festival, savouring some of the highlights captured on record since the 1930s, as well as previewing this year's programme

The Salzburg Festival, whose centennial year this is, has long been the most comprehensive of the world's classical music festivals. During this year's celebrations, some 200 performances will play across more than a dozen venues in every conceivable genre from orchestral and chamber music to sacred music and song. And opera, of course. This year there are nine operas, four in new productions. Not even a bespoke opera festival such as Glyndebourne can outscore that.

The Salzburg Festival, like Edinburgh's in 1947, was founded as a vehicle for hope and reconciliation in the aftermath of war. Salzburg was never, however, saddled with makeshift facilities or uncertain cashflows: what the journalist Bernard Levin used to call Edinburgh City Council's 'annual grudging of the money'. Within a decade of its festival's founding in 1920, this small provincial west-Austrian city had not one but two bespoke opera houses, to which a third, the grand state-owned Grosses Festspielhaus or Large Festival Hall, would be added in 1960.

With its rusticated dark stonework and classically simple design, the Grosses Festspielhaus frontage has something of the look of a Florentine Medici palace. Indeed, there is something Florentine about Salzburg itself, with its medieval archbishop's palace perched high above the city, its wooded hills, its ancient monasteries, its domes and towers, squares and courtyards, its high narrow Italianate streets, and the breathtaking views that can be had within minutes of ascending either of the hills that flank the River Salzach.

Mozart had no great affection for the city, but Salzburg clung to his memory. In 1887 a committee was formed to examine the possibility of building 'a temple of art' on the Mönchsberg, the hill which overlooks the present-day complex of Salzburg theatres. In 1906, Gustav Mahler, Richard Strauss and Reynaldo Hahn staged a small Mozart opera festival there (Strauss bagging his beloved *Così fan tutte*), and by 1914 the new Mozarteum, a handsome *Jugendstil* building, was ready. An early pupil was the very young Herbert von Karajan, who chuckled over a mistake in one of the music quotations on the facade.

The festival's founders were Strauss, the poet and dramatist Hugo von Hofmannsthal and theatre director Max Reinhardt. The Austrian-born Hofmannsthal believed that Germany and Austria were indissolubly linked, not politically but through a shared cultural heritage – Gluck, Mozart, Goethe, Schiller, Beethoven – that would be central to Salzburg's purpose. Catholicism was also important, as was Salzburg's location, at the heart of Europe yet well removed from any politically tainted imperial capital. As a reflection of this founding ideal, the 2020 festival will have a week-long Overture spirituelle (July 19–25) entitled Pax (Peace). It begins with Britten's *War Requiem* before ranging across the centuries to end with Beethoven's *Missa solemnis* and Nono's *La lontananza nostalgica utopica futura*.

From its earliest years, the Salzburg Festival was well served by radio. Austrian Radio recordings of sacred music by Mozart and Bruckner directed by the cathedral organist Joseph Messner were among the earliest prizes. In 1935, America's NBC network began broadcasting live from the festival, prompted by the presence of Arturo Toscanini – whose appearances between 1934 and 1937 rivalled even the Salzkammergut's famous summer storms in the amount of electricity they generated. Verdi's *Falstaff* is preserved on record, and a famous *Die Meistersinger* which Austrian Radio recorded onto 8mm acetate Selenophone film, skilfully transferred to CD by Andante in 2003.

In recent decades the Orfeo label has been able to draw on the vast Austrian Radio archive for its series Salzburger Festspielsdokumente (for current availabilities best go to the Presto Classical website), as have companies such as Deutsche Grammophon and Testament. Orfeo has released a particularly stellar array of Salzburg piano recitals by Claudio Arrau, Shura Cherkassky, Clifford Curzon, Emil Gilels, Clara Haskil, Sviatoslav Richter and the like. Such is the festival's ambient mood, few performances disappoint. As an impressionable undergraduate hearing Curzon play Mozart's last piano concerto with George Szell and the Berlin Philharmonic in 1964, I thought I was in the presence of something close to musical perfection. And so it proved when Orfeo published the broadcast in 2007.

The first recorded Mozart stage production was a German-language *Le nozze di Figaro*, live from the 1942 festival, Clemens Krauss conducting. And what fabulous conducting it is! When everything is so vividly communicated, you can pretty well see the staging, even on CD.

It's the Strauss archive, however, that has the greater rarities. Looking at the Orfeo and DG catalogues alone, one sees the 1947 *Arabella* conducted by Karl Böhm, one of Michael Kennedy's favourite Strauss recordings, the 1952 *Die Liebe der Danae* under Krauss, and a 1959 performance of *Die Schweigsame Frau*, also directed by Böhm, that beggars belief. DVDs come and go, but we have had the famous 1960 Rudolf Hartmann *Der Rosenkavalier* conducted by Karajan, which Paul Czinner filmed; a matchless 1965 *Ariadne auf Naxos* with Sena Jurinac as the Composer, directed by Günther Rennert, again with Böhm; an unmissable Robert Carsen *Der Rosenkavalier* from 2004; and in 2018 Romeo Castellucci's *Salome* with Asmik Grigorian.

This centenary year brings Krzysztof Warlikowski's new production of *Elektra*, a work that is deep in Salzburg's DNA. It was after seeing Hofmannsthal's adaptation of Sophocles's play directed by Max Reinhardt in Berlin in 1903 that Strauss began work on his opera. Krauss conducted it at the 1934 festival, with Rose Pauly as a demoniacal Elektra, and Dimitri Mitropoulos in 1957 with Inge Borkh, a production that was still being talked about in 1964 when Karajan conducted and directed it for the Strauss centenary. That, as I recall, was more concerned to re-explore the opera's Sophoclean roots



Salzburg by night with the Grosses Festspielhaus, the city's largest concert-hall and opera house, bottom right

than its *fin de siècle* decadence. If Warlikowski's grimly explicit 2018 staging of Henze's *The Bassarids* is anything to go by, he may have other ideas.

One ace Salzburg has always had up its sleeve is an Italian connection that dates to 1925, when Bruno Walter conducted Donizetti's *Don Pasquale* with Maria Ivogün and Karl Erb (who both recorded extracts for Odeon) as Norina and Ernesto. So it is that *Don Pasquale* is this year's opera at the Salzburg Whitsun Festival (May 29 - June 1, booking now open) which Cecilia Bartoli so skilfully curates, with further performances during the summer festival. Eyebrows were raised in 1925, and again in 1935 when Toscanini programmed *Falstaff*. Nor was Karajan entirely immune from local censure, despite an unforgettable 1962 *Il trovatore* with Giulietta Simionato, Franco Corelli and Leontyne Price (and a memorable Verdi Requiem to go with it) or the 1970 *Otello* with Jon Vickers, Mirella Freni and Peter Glossop, after which the young Mariss Jansons walked the streets till dawn. (Had I been younger, I'd have done the same in 2017 after Jansons's *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District*.)

Salzburg has always embraced the new, a fact often poorly understood by the British press. When the radically minded Belgian-born outsider Gérard Mortier became festival director in 1992, it was said that he would shake things up. As indeed he did, though it is typical of Salzburg that Mortier's opening shot, a staging of Messiaen's 1983 epic *Saint François d'Assise*, had been anticipated by the 1985 festival, when extracts from the new work were staged with Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau in the title-role.

Three years before Mortier's arrival, a ceremonial arch was placed over the River Salzach, not by the local tourist board but by two young avant-garde musicians, Markus Hinterhäuser and

Tomas Zierhofer-Kin, who'd invited some leading contemporary composers to write brief pieces about the river and the flux of time itself. It was called *Zeitfluss*, and in 1993, thanks mainly to Claudio Abbado and concert director Hans Landesmann, it became the festival's new radical 'fringe'.

Neither Hinterhäuser nor Zierhofer-Kin wanted to 'run' anything; they simply wanted to programme the music of Nono, Ligeti, Stockhausen and Feldman, and on one occasion, in a salt mine outside Salzburg, Cecil Taylor, whose antics caused large sections of the audience to flee the scene. (Schiller's *Maria Stuart* plays there this year.) Hinterhäuser's most recent recordings have been as a Schumann and Schubert pianist with the baritone Matthias Goerne; but don't miss his 1990s recording, now on a Neos CD, of Nono's ... *sofferte onde serene* ... for piano and pre-recorded tape.

Despite his 31-year-old self not wishing to 'run' anything, Hinterhäuser is now artistic director of the Salzburg Festival, and it shows. Even a cursory glance at the centenary programme reveals a celebration that has been put together by a musician of enterprise, intelligence and taste, well versed in the history of what has gone before yet mindful of the flux-ridden times in which we live.

Take the promised new staging of Nono's *Intolleranza 1960*, a two-part *azione scenica* that had its premiere in Venice in 1961. Misjudged at the time as Marxist claptrap, it concerns a migrant worker who is arrested and tortured, attempts to return to his homeland, and is killed when a jerry-built reservoir fails. Let's hope that the new Italian-language realisation with staging, choreography and video production by Jan Lauwers makes it onto DVD. All we've had to date are a couple of fairly excruciating German-language CDs.

The dichotomies of life and death, darkness and light, run through *Intolleranza*, *Elektra* and this year's two Mozart operas. Troubled rulers also feature in Mussorgsky's *Boris Godunov* (the festival's third staging, this time in the Shostakovich version); *I vespri siciliani*, Verdi's first great study of isolation in power, with Plácido Domingo as Monforte; and Shakespeare's *Richard III*, which is one of the festival's six theatre productions.

Meanwhile, if you are holidaying in the glorious Salzkammergut (location of Mahler's composing hut on the Attersee and the Léhar-Villa in Bad Ischl), or even taking a *Sound of Music* tour, don't overlook the Salzburg Festival's grand centenary exhibition (April 25 - October 31). It's an absorbing history and it promises to be an absorbing show. **G** This year's Salzburg Festival runs from July 18 to August 30; visit salzburgfestival.at. Early booking closed in January; direct sales begin online March 27

GRAMOPHONE *Festival* GUIDE 2020

*Welcome to our annual guide for the UK, Europe and North America!
Whether you're a concert-goer, an opera lover, a music-maker, or all three,
you'll find a whole host of events this season to provoke, stimulate and enjoy*

UK FESTIVALS

Aldeburgh Festival

June 12-28

The offerings are as rich and original as ever this year at Aldeburgh. There are four Artists-in-Residence, including American soprano Julia Bullock, whose three concerts feature the music of festival-founder Benjamin Britten, Josephine Baker, and American experimentalism. Another is tenor Allan Clayton, who focuses on Britten and his contemporary, Ivy Praelix Rainier. As ever, the new music of today is strongly represented, notably with the premiere of rising star Tom Coult's first opera, *Violet*. Other highlights include a focus on the poetry of TS Eliot and the music of John Tavener, as well as further residencies from Ryan Wigglesworth, the Doric Quartet and the Bozzini Quartet. BBC Radio 3 plans to broadcast eight concerts and feature *Violet* on the New Music Show.

snapemaltings.co.uk/season/aldeburgh-festival

Bampton Classical Opera

July 17-18, Gardens at The Grange, Bampton, Oxfordshire
August 31, The Orangery Theatre, Westonbirt School, Gloucestershire
September 18, St John's Smith Square

Committed to breathing new life into little-known works of the Classical period, and equally focused on delivering relaxed, accessible opera at affordable prices, Bampton Classical Opera presents Gluck's rarely performed 1770 opera *Paride ed Elena* as its 2020 production, the third of Gluck's so-called 'reform' operas (after *Orfeo ed Euridice* and *Alceste*), in which he collaborated with the librettist Calzabigi to produce a new type of music drama. Marking 250 years since its premiere, the opera is heard here in a new English translation by Gilly French, as *Paris and Helen*, and is conducted by Royal Northern Sinfonia Assistant Conductor Karin Hendrickson.

bamptonopera.org

The Bath Festival

May 15-24

Bath's historic architecture is being put to especially good use in the festival's classical programming this year. For instance there's Charles Hazlewood conducting Paraorchestra in Górecki's *Symphony of Sorrowful Songs* in the unique and intimate setting of the Roman Baths. Then even more intimate is David Pountney's staging of Poulenc's intensely theatrical

one-woman opera, *La Voix Humaine*, starring soprano Claire Booth as a woman on the phone to her lover, who is ending their relationship; this is performed at a secret location in one of Bath's Georgian town houses. Other highlights include Beethoven quartets from the Heath Quartet, and the return of the Bath Festival Orchestra, with Peter Manning conducting a programme of Mozart, Brahms, Ligeti and Strauss featuring Swedish soprano Johanna Wallroth.

bathfestivals.org.uk

BBC Proms

July 17 - September 12

Full details of the BBC Proms season will be announced on April 22.

bbc.co.uk/proms

Beverley and East Riding Early Music Festival

May 29-31

Based in the Yorkshire market town of Beverley and organised by York's National Centre for Early Music, this festival takes New World Horizons as its theme for 2020, looking to the musical heritage of the people of East Riding who left England 400 years ago to start a new life in the New World. Stile Antico sings the opening concert, and period ensemble La Serenissima also pays

a visit. One other highlight beyond the main theme is a programme from lutenist Matthew Wadsworth and soprano Julia Doyle, linking the music of London and Venice.

ncem.co.uk/bemf

Brighton Festival

May 2-24

Guest directing the UK's largest and most established multi-arts festival this year is the acclaimed poet Lemn Sissay, and the classical music offerings are as strong as ever. An orchestral highlight is Ádám Fischer conducting the London Symphony Orchestra in Dvořák's *New World* Symphony and Mozart's Violin Concerto K211 with soloist Nikolaj Szeps-Znaider. Another highlight is a fully staged multimedia production of Terry Riley's *Sun Rings*, performed by the Kronos Quartet and Brighton Festival Chorus. Brand new music comes from a festival co-commission, *Dear Nature*, by Sally Beamish, which uses a solo cello to connect a series of 81 nature-themed letters by artist John Newling. A Baroque standout, meanwhile, is a programme, 'Handel's Unsung Heroes', from La Nuova Musica, conducted by David Bates, and featuring countertenor Iestyn Davies.

brightonfestival.org

Buckingham Summer Festival**July 4-11**

Taking place in the market town of Buckingham, this festival offers morning piano recitals, as well as lunchtime and evening concerts. Highlights include its closing concert, festival Artistic Director Robert Secret honouring the Beethoven 250th anniversary by conducting The Orchestra of Stowe Opera in a programme that will include Piano Concerto No 5, the *Emperor*, with soloist Yuko Sano. buckinghamsummerfestival.org

Bury Festival**May 15-24**

Classical highlights across the 11 days of this multi-arts festival include the St Petersburg Symphony Orchestra with violinist Jennifer Pike playing Sibelius, Tchaikovsky and Prokofiev, The Sixteen on their choral pilgrimage, and Aurora Orchestra playing Beethoven's *Eroica* Symphony No 3 from memory. There's also Sarah Nicholls and her Inside-Out Piano, and the Armonico Consort alongside Oz Clarke exploring the links between gin and music. buryfestival.co.uk

Buxton International Festival**July 3-19**

This Peak District festival presents its biggest ever programme this year, with four opera productions: Rossini's *La donna del lago*, Hahn's *Ciboulette*, Handel's *Acis and Galatea* and Tom Coult's *Violet*; plus a newly commissioned opera oratorio about climate change by Kate Whitley, *Our Future: In Your Hands*. The Buxton Festival will also stage its first musical: Stephen Sondheim's *A Little Night Music*. The concert series welcomes violinist Jennifer Pike as Artist-in-Residence, and other artists and ensembles including baritone Roderick Williams, The Kanneh-Mason Piano Trio, bass John Tomlinson, mezzo-soprano Sarah Connolly, and the BBC Philharmonic. As ever, Buxton's famous Frank Matcham Opera House hosts many of the events, while other venues include, for the first time, Buxton Crescent Hotel's newly opened Assembly Rooms. buxtonfestival.co.uk

Cambridge Summer Music Festival**10-25 July**

The CMSF is held in atmospheric venues throughout Cambridge, and this year violinist Freya Goldmark joins as its new Director, teaming up with existing Artistic Director, conductor David Hill. Beethoven features strongly, albeit by no means exclusively, highlights including the opening night recital by violinist Tasmin Little and Martin Roscoe, programming Beethoven

alongside Beach, Mozart and Franck; also late quartets from the Chiaroscuro Quartet, and the *Eroica* Symphony No 3 from the Faust Chamber Orchestra, paired with Haydn's Cello Concerto No 1 with soloist Guy Johnston. Other highlights include Ysaÿe violin sonatas from Goldmark herself, and a harpsichord recital of Couperin and Bach from Hill with David Ponsford. You can also hear all six of Bach's solo suites from Robert Max. cambridgesummertime.com

Festival of Chichester**June 13 - July 12**

Classical, rock, blues, jazz, folk and world music rub shoulders in this festival which has become one of the largest in the south. Classical acts for 2020 include the London Mozart Players with saxophonist Jess Gillam. Among the visiting ensembles are the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra at the cathedral, and Ensemble Reza at St John's Chapel. Chamber highlights include Beethoven cello and piano sonatas from Pavlos Carvalho and Louisa Lam at St Paul's Church, Bach's solo cello suites from Pavlos Carvalho, also at St John's, and Russian pianist Victor Ryabchikov at Christchurch playing Russian Romantics, Chopin and John Field. Artists appearing at Pallant House Gallery meanwhile include pianist Young Choon Park. festivalofchichester.co.uk

Chipping Campden Music Festival**May 9-23**

Very much beloved by regular returning soloists such as cellist Steven Isserlis, this Cotswolds festival is based in Chipping Campden's picturesque St James's Church. The Beethoven 250th anniversary is well marked this year, beginning with the very first event - a discussion with Professor Laura Tunbridge on her forthcoming book about Beethoven, illustrated with recorded extracts of the composer's music. Further Beethoven highlights across the two weeks include the following evening's string quartets from the Jerusalem Quartet, and a piano recital from festival President Paul Lewis. The 2020 edition equally stands out for an especially high number of debut appearances, including *Gramophone* Award-winning period ensemble La Serenissima, clarinettist Julian Bliss's new ensemble, the Bliss Wind Soloists, and Camerata RCO, comprising members of the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra. There's also a piano masterclass hosted by another festival regular, Richard Goode, and a recital from mezzo-soprano Sarah Connolly and pianist Joseph Middleton. campdenmusicfestival.co.uk

BEETHOVEN 250**Carducci Festival Highnam****May 15-17**

Based in the Gloucestershire village of Highnam, this festival is hosted by the Carducci Quartet. We particularly like the thoughtful angle they have taken on the Beethoven 250th anniversary for their opening concert with pianist Kathryn Stott, because this begins with Janáček's String Quartet No 1, *Kreutzer Sonata*, before continuing with Liszt's piano transcription of the Scherzo from Beethoven's Symphony No 7. Or there's the concert for which they're joined by clarinettist Julian Bliss, which begins with Beethoven's String Quartet in C minor Op 18 No 4, followed by works by Gershwin, Poulenc and David Bruce. Another notable festival guest is pianist Martin Roscoe, who performs Schubert's *Trout* Quintet with the Carducci Quartet at the closing concert. carduccifestivalhighnam.co.uk



Visit the Carducci Quartet 'at home' in Highnam

Corbridge Chamber Music Festival**July 24-26**

This weekend festival based at St Andrew's Church in the Tynedale village of Corbridge is directed and performed by the Gould Piano Trio (Benjamin Frith, Lucy Gould and Alison Neary) and clarinettist Robert Plane, with various invited guests. This year they're joined by Composer-in-Residence, Piers Hellawell, the Elias Quartet, dancer Kenji Wilkie and poet Sinéad Morrissey. corbridgefestival.co.uk

Dartington International Summer School**July 25 - August 22**

Four weeks of shared music-making, learning and listening, from

early music to jazz, with courses for all ages and abilities and over 70 concerts, is set against the backdrop of a medieval estate in the heart of Devon, with the option of staying onsite for participants. In other words, this is one of the UK's most enriching and wide-ranging classical festivals. This year is its first under its new Artistic Director, BBC Radio 3 broadcaster Sara Mohr-Pietsch, and she's already making an exciting mark on its shape. New elements include weekly Future Sounds courses featuring writers, thinkers and radio-makers. New music is championed via the commissioning of two major works for big choir, and bringing composition teaching into every week. There's also a host of national partners, including the

BEETHOVEN 250**Cheltenham Music Festival****July 3-12 (and June 27-28)**

Guest Curated by Jules Buckley, the Cheltenham Music Festival's 10 days of events include an opening weekend of free music. Beethoven's 250th anniversary is marked in style, beginning with a pre-festival immersive chamber weekend at Syde Manor. Then during the actual festival there's 'Beethoven Up Close', which sees privately owned Regency town houses open up their drawing rooms for recitals emulating the chamber atmospheres of Beethoven's own day. There's also the Bliss Wind Soloists performing the Octet for Winds, and Symphony No 8. Visiting ensembles include Aurora Orchestra, the Philharmonia, the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra and New English Ballet Theatre. Visiting soloists include mezzo Dame Sarah Connolly, guitarist Miloš Karadaglić and tenor Ian Bostridge with pianist Imogen Cooper. New for 2020 is 'RePlay', a strand giving audiences the opportunity to listen again to recent commissions. cheltenhamfestivals.com/music



Nicholas Collon brings Aurora to Cheltenham

THE
FOURTEENTH

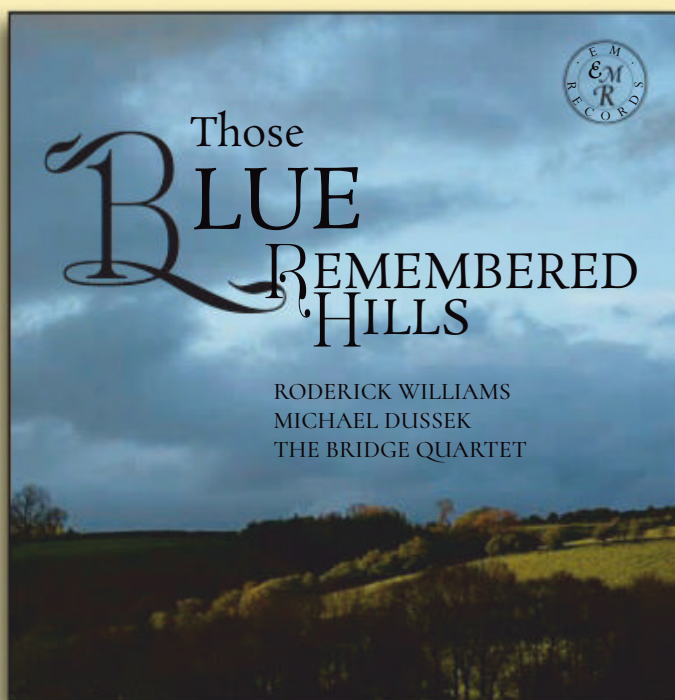
ENGLISH MUSIC FESTIVAL

Join us at the Fourteenth English Music Festival, in and around the magnificent mediaeval Abbey at Dorchester-on-Thames, for a thrilling weekend of music-making – from Roderick Williams singing Vaughan Williams and Howells, and the BBC Concert Orchestra playing world premières of works by Elgar and Delius alongside Coleridge-Taylor's gorgeous Violin Concerto, through the Armonico Consort performing Purcell and Handel and late-evening 1930s jazz, to a rare performance of Holst's glorious *Cloud Messenger* and a recital of songs by Warlock, Bax and Moeran.

Book at www.englishmusicfestival.org.uk/2020-oxfordshire-festival/box-office.php. For a postal booking form or further information please contact Festival Director Em Marshall-Luck at The English Music Festival, PO Box 123, Clunton, Craven Arms, Shropshire SY7 7BP or email em.marshall-luck@englishmusicfestival.org.uk.

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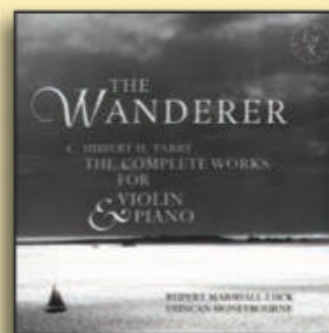
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Royal Philharmonic Society. Beethoven highlights include Thomas Gould playing the Violin Concerto, and Martin Roscoe leading amateurs and students in a marathon performance of the complete piano sonatas.

dartington.org/summerschool

Dorset Opera Festival

July 21-25

Set within 400 acres of Dorset countryside at Bryanston, this country-house opera festival stages two large-scale productions each year, complemented by a summer school. Worth noting is the festival's relaxed mood, because while there's the *de rigueur* fine picnics, champagne bars, cream teas and five-course dinners, there's no dress code. This year's productions are Puccini's *La Rondine* and Mussorgsky's *Boris Godunov*, both of which are sung in English with surtitles.

dorsetopera.com

Dunster Festival

May 22-24

Taking place over the Spring Bank Holiday weekend, this Somerset festival is based in and around Dunster's Priory Church of St George. For its third edition, artists include Septura brass septet performing brass arrangements of Ravel, Debussy and Gershwin. There's also The Marian Consort with 'Singing in Secret', an exploration of the music of William Byrd and his contemporaries which includes Byrd's Savonarolan motet, *Infelix Ego*; and violinist Daniel Pioro in an atmospheric late-night session with works by Cassandra Miller, Edmund Finnis and Heinrich Biber. Also featured are dedicated children's and baby concerts, a gong bath, and a participatory choral workshop. The Carducci Quartet closes the festival with string quartets by Beethoven, Glass and Mendelssohn.

dunsterfestival.co.uk

East Neuk Festival

July 1-5

An eclectic range of concerts and events take place at intimate locations nestled amongst the fishing villages of St Monans, Anstruther, Kilrenny and Crail. This Scottish coastal festival is also running community beach cleans as its 2020 Big Project, culminating in a 100-strong Fantastic Plastic Parade Band. Further highlights include The Tallis Scholars with their first-ever performance of Arvo Pärt's rarely heard *Kanon Pokajanen* ('Canon of Repentance'), as part of an ENF focus on the Estonian composer. Other artists and ensembles include pianists Liŷr Williams and Yeol Eum Son, the Calidore and Castalian quartets, the Belfiato Quintet, harpists Oliver

Wass and Esther Swift, organist Tom Wilkinson, and conductor Daniel Blendulf, who conducts the Scottish Chamber Orchestra in the festival's closing concert.

eastneukfestival.com

Edinburgh International Festival

August 7-31

This year's packed festival opens with the Philharmonia Orchestra performing Mahler's *Das klagende Lied* under the baton of Esa-Pekka Salonen, beginning an orchestral residency that also features Garsington's new production of Dvořák's *Rusalka*, with Natalya Romaniw in the title role. Opera in concert includes Nina Stemme in Bartók's *Bluebeard's Castle*, and Edward Gardner conducting the Bergen Philharmonic in Strauss's *Salome*, Malin Byström singing the title role. Piano highlights include Mikhail Pletnev performing with the Russian National Orchestra, and Paul Lewis leading the Scottish Chamber Orchestra from the keyboard in a Beethoven concerto cycle. Morning chamber concerts include recitals by pianist Daniil Trifonov, mezzo Susan Graham, the Elias Quartet, and Jordi Savall and Hespèrion XXI. The Festival closes with Brahms's *A German Requiem* from the Czech Philharmonic under Semyon Bychkov.

eif.co.uk

Elgar Festival

May 28-31

Four days of events celebrate the life and music of Sir Edward Elgar, around his home town of Worcester and at the time of his birthday, with concerts taking place in venues such as Worcester Cathedral and Malvern Priory. Initiatives for 2020 include the introduction of an Elgar Festival Chorus and the Enigma Youth Choir to complement the existing resident English Symphony Orchestra (ESO), plus late-night jazz and non-classical performances at Club Elgar in the Royal Porcelain Works. Highlights include Elgar's Symphony No 1 from the ESO, and a Club Elgar appearance from jazz ensemble, the Misha Mullov-Abbado Group. The choir of Merton College Oxford also performs the regional premiere of a work by Worcester-based composer, Ian Venables.

elgarfestival.org

English Haydn Festival

June 3-6

This Bridgenorth festival focuses on the music of Haydn and other celebrated 19th-century composers. The theme of the 2020 edition is 'Haydn: Musical Innovations and Invention'. Further details weren't available as we went to press, but previous years have seen visits from major artists.

englishhaydn.com

English Music Festival, Dorchester-on-Thames

May 22-25

Taking place in and around the medieval Abbey at Dorchester-on-Thames, this year's festival opens with the BBC Concert Orchestra presenting world premieres of works by Elgar and Delius alongside Coleridge-Taylor's Violin Concerto, in a concert to be broadcast by BBC Radio 3. The weekend's other concerts include baritone Roderick Williams singing Vaughan Williams and Howells, the Armonico Consort performing Purcell and Handel, and a rare performance of Holst's *The Cloud Messenger*. All this is complemented by talks, social events, and relaxed late-evening concerts featuring 1930s jazz and light piano music.

englishmusicfestival.org.uk

Fishguard and West Wales International Music Festival

July 20-31

Set against the stunning backdrop of the Pembrokeshire coastline, this festival's programme is looking especially tempting this year. Visiting established artists and ensembles include the Welsh National Opera Chamber Ensemble, pianist Liŷr Williams, and violinist Tasmin Little performing with the European Union Chamber Orchestra. Then there's the level of the young artists visiting this year. Take the Marmen Quartet, who last year won both First Prize at the Banff International String Competition, and the Grand Prize at the Bordeaux International String Quartet Competition. There's also YCAT cellist Jamal Aliyev, and the Palisander recorder quartet which last year was selected for the prestigious EEEmerging scheme for emerging European ensembles. Talks by composer Geraint Lewis include Elgar in West Wales.

fishguardmusicfestival.com

Garsington Opera

May 28 - July 18

Based at the Wormsley estate in the Chiltern Hills with the Philharmonia Orchestra as its principal resident ensemble, Garsington Opera's four productions for 2020 open with Verdi's first comic opera, *Un giorno di regno*, directed by Christopher Alden making his Garsington directing debut; Tobias Ringborg conducts the Philharmonia Orchestra, Grant Doyle sings Belfiore and Christine Rice sings the Marchesa. The festival's new partnership with The English Concert enters its second year with Mozart's *Mitridate* conducted by Clemens Schuldt, also making his Garsington debut, with Tim Albery directing and Robert Murray in the title role. A new production from Michael Boyd of Dvořák's *Rusalka* follows, Douglas Boyd conducting a

cast headed up by Natalya Romaniw as Rusalka and Gerard Schneider as the Prince. The fourth production then celebrates the Beethoven 250th anniversary by reviving John Cox's acclaimed production of *Fidelio*, with further Garsington debuts by conductor Gerard Korsten and soprano Johanni van Oostrum as Leonore, alongside Toby Spence as Florestan.

garsingtonopera.org

Glyndebourne

May 21 - August 30

Glyndebourne's first ever production of Poulenc's *Dialogues des Carmélites* opens the UK's most famous country house festival this year, staged by Barrie Kosky; Robin Ticciati conducts a stellar cast including Danielle de Niese, Doris Soffel, Golda Schultz, Karen Cargill and Cyril Dubois. The Beethoven anniversary meanwhile is honoured in grand style by a newly commissioned production of *Fidelio* by Frederic Wake-Walker, Ticciati conducting a cast headed by Emma Bell as Leonore and David Butt Philip as Florestan. Another newly-commissioned production for 2020 is Glyndebourne's first ever staging of Handel's *Alcina* from Francesco Micheli, Gianluca Capuano conducting a cast featuring Kristina Mkhitarian in the title role. Also on the bill are the return of John Cox's production of Stravinsky's *The Rake's Progress* with its designs by David Hockney, conducted by Jakub Hrůša, plus Annabel Arden's production of Donizetti's *L'elisir d'amore* led by Enrique Mazzola, and Nicholas Carter conducting David McVicar's production of Mozart's *Die Entführung aus dem Serail*.

glyndebourne.com

The Grange Festival

June 5 - July 19

Based at The Grange in Northington and under the artistic direction of Michael Chance, this festival has the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra as its resident ensemble and also presents dance under the direction of Wayne McGregor. The season opens with Rossini's *La Cenerentola*, David Parry conducting a cast headed by Josè Maria Lo Monaco. Hot on its heels is Paul Curran's staging of Britten's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* with Rhian Lois as Tytania and Patrick Terry as Oberon. The two other operas are Puccini's *Manon Lescaut* and Jonathan Dove's *The Monster in the Maze*, the latter a community opera accompanied by Hampshire Youth Orchestra. *My Fair Lady* is also on the bill. The dance offering is a major one: festival patron, The Royal Ballet's Edward Watson, performs a new work especially created for him by Mthuthuzeli November.

thegrangefestival.co.uk

BEETHOVEN 250

Investec International Music Festival

March 26 - May 16

This Surrey Hills festival has some especially tempting Beethoven anniversary offerings for 2020. These begin with the opening event in Hatchlands Park's Music Room, at which poet Ruth Padel reads from her new collection, *Beethoven Variations: Poems on a Life*, with musical excerpts performed by Artistic Director



Wu Qian plays Beethoven on historic instruments

Wu Qian on a 1790s grand piano once played by Beethoven himself, from the house's Cobbe Collection of historic keyboard instruments. Wu Qian also presents a programme of Beethoven and Mendelssohn at the Menuhin Hall with cellist Gary Hoffman. Other highlights include lutenist Paula Chateaufort performing the first concert to take place in the Stone Hall at West Horsley Place, and an orchestral finale with the English Chamber Orchestra, flautist Adam Walker and soprano Elin Manahan Thomas.

iimf.co.uk

Grange Park Opera

June 4 - July 19

Based at West Horsley Place, Surrey, Grange Park Opera stages its productions in an intimate five-tired woodland theatre, with the English National Opera Orchestra and the BBC Concert Orchestra. Tenor Joseph Calleja leads the cast in the season's first production, Verdi's *La Gioconda*, directed by Stephen Medcalf and conducted by Gianluca Marcianno. Other operas include the world premiere of Anthony Bolton's *The Life and Death of Alexander Litvinenko*, directed again by Medcalf with a libretto by Kit Hesketh-Harvey, and Puccini's *La bohème* conducted by Stephen Barlow with Cody Austin as Rodolfo and Ailish Tynan as Mimì. This year's musical is *Meet Me in St Louis*. The season concludes with the festival's first foray into the world of dance, *Ballet in the Woods*, with stars of The Royal Ballet.

grangeparkopera.co.uk

Gregynog Festival

June 15-21

Themed Generosity, Wales's oldest extant classical music festival this year marks 100 years since Gwendoline and Margaret Davies purchased Gregynog Hall to realise their vision of creating an arts centre in the wake of the First World War. The 2020 edition is therefore inspired by other great patronesses of the past, with headline artists including mezzo Lea Desandre and Ensemble Jupiter directed by lutenist Thomas Dunford, making their UK debut with a Vivaldi programme reflecting their acclaimed debut on Alpha Classics. Also performing are harpists Maximilian Ehrhardt and Alis Huws, and multi-award-winning folk band

VR. There's also a rich supporting programme of talks and exhibitions led by the historians Peter Lord, Shaun Evans, and the festival's Artistic Director, Rhian Davies.

gregynogfestival.org

Harrogate International Festival

June 27 - July 26

Classical, jazz, outdoor theatre and family friendly events are all covered by this North Yorkshire spa town's music festival. This year's edition opens begins with a ten-day classical offering to include a candlelit concert from vocal ensemble Stile Antico, and a performance by the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra to mark the Beethoven 250th anniversary.

harrogateinternationalfestivals.com/harrogate-music-festival/

Holt Festival

July 26 - August 1

This North Norfolk Georgian town's festival hosts a mixture of international music, drama, comedy, visual art, street theatre, workshops and more. The full programme hadn't been announced as we went to press but will be published on the website in May.

holtfestival.org

Holy Week Festival

April 5-12

Under the artistic directorship of Nigel Short, whose choir Tenebrae features strongly across the programming, this St John's Smith Square festival presents a mix of workshops, ticketed concerts and free late-night liturgical events exploring a vast range of sacred music in celebration of Holy Week. New for 2020 is a focus on mental health and wellbeing, including a

pre-concert panel discussion on music and lamentation, and a guided meditation to open the festival ahead of a reflective concert from vocal ensemble Siglo de Oro. Tenebrae's own performances include Allegri's *Miserere* and Tallis's *Lamentations of Jeremiah*. Other headline performers include the King's Singers, Polyphony, The Tallis Scholars, the Choir of Merton College, Oxford with Florilegium, and festival newcomers, female-voice ensemble Musica Secreta, with the recently discovered complete Brumel *Lamentations*. sjss.org.uk; tenebrae-choir.com

Iford Arts

May 23-24, Guildhall, Bath

August 29 - September 4,

Belcombe Court, Bradford on Avon
September 19, Holy Trinity Church, Bradford on Avon

Iford Arts has a new look and new venues this year. Its offerings begin with Lehár's *The Merry Widow* in the banquet hall of the Guildhall, Bath; Simon Butteriss directs, with the orchestra conducted by the festival's Musical Director Oliver Gooch. Next there's a welcome return to the historic gardens of Belcombe Court, for Bizet's *Carmen*, conducted again by Gooch. The third production then sees Christian Curnyn lead Handel's *Acis and Galatea* from the harpsichord in Bradford on Avon's recently renovated Holy Trinity Church. Punctuating the season are classical concerts, plus picnic proms with jazz singer Clare Teal, details of which will appear on the website.

ifordarts.org.uk

JAM on the Marsh

July 1-12

This annual multi-arts festival takes place in and around Romney

Marsh's magnificent medieval churches. Visiting artists include the BBC Singers, Gesualdo Six, Durham Cathedral Choir with Onyx Brass, Lesley Garrett, and London Mozart Players with the world premiere of Paul Mealor's Piano Concerto. The programme also includes Changeling Theatre's open-air *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, alongside photography exhibitions and poetry.

jamconcert.org/jam-on-the-marsh

Lake District Summer Music International Festival

August 1-14

Over around 40 events in 11 venues spread across the South Lakes, 2020 celebrates the voice, from speech to song. Highlights include the opening concert of Monteverdi's 1610 Vespers by the Marian Consort - part of an early music focus that also features the Phantasm Viol Consort, Apollo's Cabinet and Melismata. Brahms is a featured composer, with solo and chamber works played by pianist Peter Donohoe, cellist Robert Cohen, the Gould Piano Trio and the Albion and Elias Quartets. This year's solo instrument focus meanwhile is the trombone, which features strongly in the National Youth Jazz Orchestra's Glenn Miller celebration. One final highlight is the closing concert, featuring a rare performance of Walton's music to Shakespeare's *Henry V*, with narrator.

lsdm.org.uk

Lammermuir Festival

September 11-21

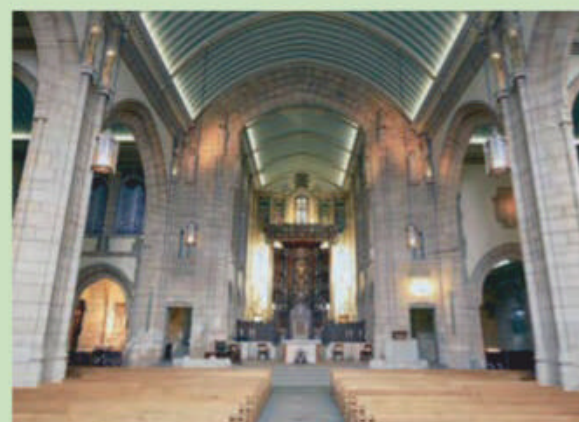
The festival offers 11 days of music in beautiful venues across the historic region of East Lothian, and there's all sorts of interesting

BEETHOVEN 250

Leeds International Organ Festival

May 11 - July 15

Lunchtime and evening recitals, lectures, masterclasses and a young organists' training programme make this festival in Leeds Cathedral a varied one. One festival highlight is Master of the Queen's Music, Judith Weir, in conversation with Opera North General Director, Richard



Mantle, preceded by a concert from Leeds Cathedral Choir. Further highlights include one of the most unusual Beethoven anniversary events in these pages: Australian organist Thomas Heywood performing his transcription of Symphony No 5, as part of a project to become the first soloist to transcribe and record all nine symphonies while performing them around the globe; indeed if you're in Bonn in June, he'll be premiering his No 3 transcription there, plus recording No 6.

leedsiof.org

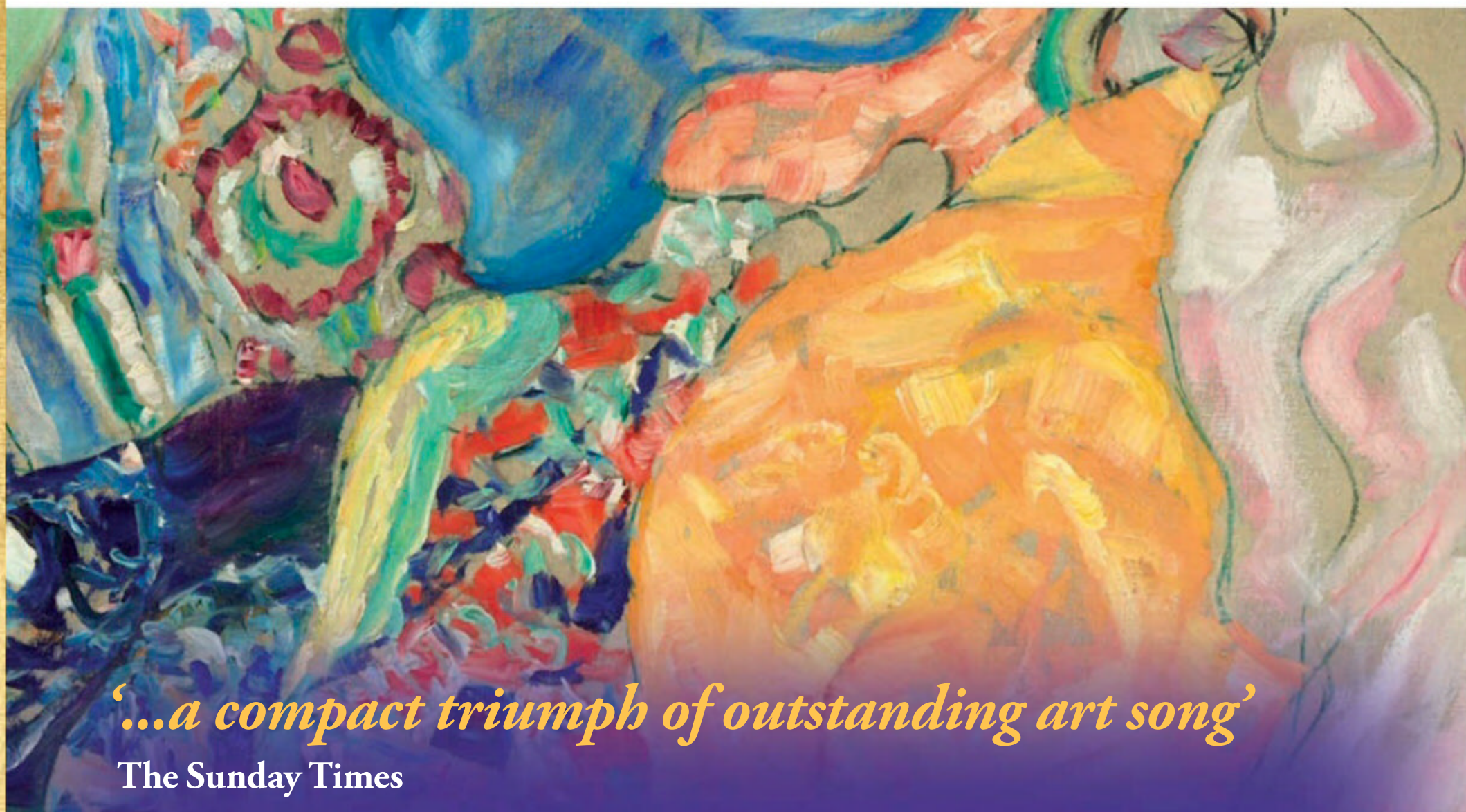
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Ode to Joy

In Praise of Leeds Lieder's 10th Festival



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Marcus Farnsworth
James Gilchrist
Anna Huntley
Graham Johnson

Jennifer Johnston
Hannah Kendall
Anna Lapwood
Dame Felicity Lott
Soraya Mafi
Joseph Middleton

Ann Murray DBE
James Newby
Victoria Newlyn
Ema Nikolovska
Dean Robinson
Carolyn Sampson

Siobhan Stagg
William Thomas
Anna Tilbrook
Roderick Williams

To see the full programme and for tickets please visit leedslieder.org.uk or concerts.leeds.ac.uk or contact the Box Office direct on **0113 343 2584**. All events take place at the School of Music, University of Leeds, Leeds, LS2 9JT.



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programming on the menu this year. Take the two concerts from the Concertgebouw Wind Soloists featuring lesser-known repertoire such as Flothuis's Quintet and Martinů's Sextet. Another highlight is *Gramophone's* January 2020 One to One artist, viola player Timothy Ridout, performing the viola version of Tchaikovsky's *Rococo Variations* with the Scottish Chamber Orchestra under Peter Whelan. Other soloists and ensembles include pianist Roman Rabinovich performing Mozart piano concertos with the Royal Northern Sinfonia, the Kopelman and Michelangelo quartets, and violinist Chloë Hanslip with pianist Danny Driver.

lammermuirfestival.co.uk

Leeds Lieder Festival 2020

April 16-19

The tenth Leeds Lieder Festival is a celebration of art song, under the artistic directorship of pianist Joseph Middleton. This year's theme is 'Ode to Joy', with concerts taking place at the University of Leeds, featuring artists include Carolyn Sampson, Roderick Williams, Siobhan Stagg and Jennifer Johnstone. There are also masterclasses by Thomas Allen, Ann Murray, Iain Burnside and Felicity Lott, plus a community-based 'Bring and Sing' event, poetry readings and open mic evenings

leedslieder.org.uk

Lichfield Summer Festival

July 9-19

Classical highlights in Lichfield Cathedral include a bespoke Festival commission to celebrate Stephen Sondheim at 90 and the BBC National Orchestra of Wales playing Beethoven as part of their continuing residency. There are also performances by I Fagiolini, Rachel Podger and many more.

lichfieldfestival.org

London Festival of Baroque Music

May 9-23

'Beyond the Spanish Golden Age' is the theme for 2020, with highlights including Spanish vocal and instrumental ensemble La Grande Chapelle making their festival debut with a programme of music by harpist Juan Hidalgo, one of the key figures in the development of 17th-century Spanish theatrical music. Wider Baroque repertoire highlights include another festival debut: French early music ensemble Le Banquet Céleste, who present Bach cantatas for alto, with countertenor and director Damien Guillon, tenor Thomas Hobbs and organist Maude Gratton. Also William Christie and Les Arts Florissants, joined by mezzo Eva Začik and lutenist Thomas Dunford, for a programme of *duetti da camera* by Handel and his

contemporaries. Other visiting artists include Sébastien Daucé and his Ensemble Correspondances.

lfbm.org.uk

London Handel Festival

March 5 - April 10

Handel and the Hanoverians is this year's theme, exploring the links between Handel and the reigning Hanoverian monarchy of his time. A highlight at the Royal Opera House's Linbury Theatre is a new staging of *Susanna*, which hasn't been performed at Covent Garden since its premiere there in 1749. Other major events include a rarely performed oratorio, *The Triumph of Time and Truth*, and the opera *Serse*. The Academy of Ancient Music makes its LHF debut with a programme featuring soloists Mary Bevan and Jennifer France. Also in the mix are chamber music recitals, lunchtime concerts, guided walks, insight talks, a 'Come and Sing' event, the return of 'Handel Remixed' in Peckham's Bussey Building, and the annual international Handel Singing Competition.

london-handel-festival.com

London Piano Festival

October 7-11

Hosted by Kings Place, this festival under the joint artistic direction of pianists Charles Owen and Katya Apekisheva has a varied programme of multi-genre music and talks. This year the festival celebrates its fifth anniversary, and highlights include the annual Two Piano Gala with a world premiere by a leading composer to be announced soon.

londonpianofestival.com

Longborough Festival Opera

June 4 - August 4

This country-house opera festival with its intimate 500-seat auditorium has a special commitment to the music of Wagner, and indeed it's a new production of *Die Walküre* that opens the 2020 season. Conducted by Longborough's Music Director Anthony Negus and directed by Amy Lane, its cast includes Mark Le Brocq as Siegmund, Sarah Marie Kramer as Sieglide and Paul Carey Jones as Wotan. The other three brand new productions are an English-language and family-friendly interpretation of Donizetti's *The Elixir of Love*, conducted by Alice Farnham and directed by Giffords Circus's Cal McCrystal; Monteverdi's *Il ritorno d'Ulisse in patria* from festival Artistic Director Polly Graham making her directorial debut, with Robert Howarth conducting The Academy of Ancient Music; then an Emerging Artist and Youth Chorus production of Janáček's *The Cunning Little Vixen*.

lfo.org.uk

BEETHOVEN 250

Machynlleth Festival

August 23-30

Curated by pianist Julius Drake and situated in the unspoilt heart of the Dyfi, this Welsh chamber music festival celebrates Beethoven through performances including the last three piano sonatas in a late-night concert by Elisabeth Leonskaja, and the complete sonatas for cello and piano from Louise Hopkins and Aleksandar Madžar. Beyond Beethoven, other highlights include song recitals from tenor Mark Padmore and rising Welsh soprano Natalya Romaniw, the Wihan Quartet playing Dvořák, the UK debut of 18-year-old Dutch pianist Nikola Meeuwssen, and a masterclass led by veteran tenor Dennis O'Neil. Welsh traditional music also features, while further visiting artists and ensembles include cellist Abel Selaoe, flamenco group Raices Flamencas, and the Elysium Brass Quintet.



Abel Selaoe comes to Wales

moma.machynlleth.org.uk

Ludlow English Song Weekend

April 3-5

Under the artistic direction of Iain Burnside, this is the only UK festival that concentrates on 20th- and 21st-century English song, which it does with a mix of recitals, choral music, masterclasses, poetry, and talks. Bookending the festival are tenor Toby Spence with a recital that includes the premiere of *Fallen* by Philip Lancaster, and baritone Roderick Williams, singing folksong arrangements by Butterworth and Britten. New for 2020 is a collaboration with the Royal Philharmonic Society: Oliver Soden discusses his Tippett biography with Katy Hamilton, following Mischa Scorer's Tippett film, *Poets in a Barren Age*. Also in the mix are four recitalists courtesy of ENO's Harewood Artists, and masterclasses by Ann Murray.

ludlowenglishsongweekend.com

Malcolm Arnold Festival, Northampton

October 17-18

For those after a weekend of total immersion in all things Arnold, this festival based at Northampton's Royal & Derngate Theatre presents live music, films and talks about the composer. Programme details will be announced on the Festival's Facebook page entitled 'Malcolm Arnold Festival'.

royalandderngate.co.uk

Mendelssohn on Mull Festival

September 6-12

Taking place on the Scottish islands of Mull and Iona, and in Oban, this festival presents an annual commemoration of Mendelssohn's productive visit to Scotland through a top-notch chamber programme. Details for 2020 weren't available as we went to press, so check the website nearer the time.

mendelssohnonmull.com

BEETHOVEN 250

Newbury Spring Festival

May 9-23

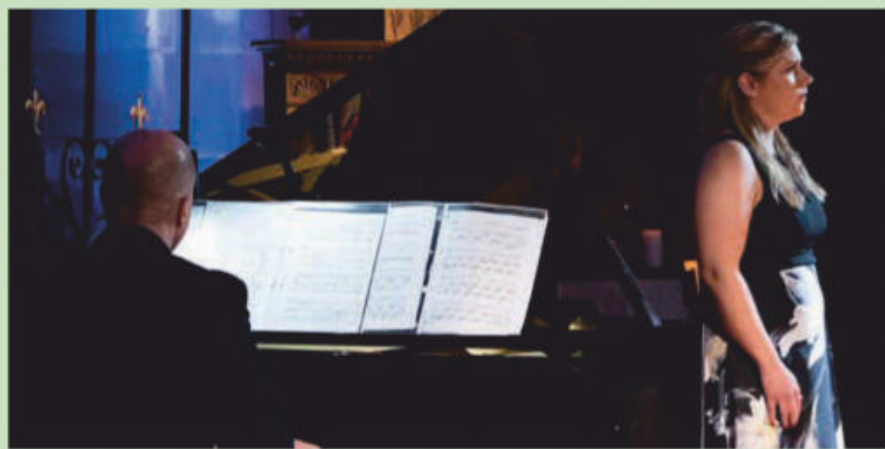
The Beethoven anniversary gets an especially good look-in this year over this Berkshire festival's two weeks. Take the two all-Beethoven programmes on its opening weekend: first Sakari Oramo conducting the BBC Symphony Orchestra in the Overture to *The Creatures of Prometheus*, Piano Concerto No 4 with soloist Paul Lewis, and Symphony No 7; then next day an all-Beethoven recital by pianist John Lill. There's also a talk by Nicholas Kenyon on how the interpretation of Beethoven's music has changed over time. Other notable events include a Richard Strauss recital from Lucy Crowe, another from BBC Cardiff Singer of the Year Andrei Kymach, the Korngold Violin Concerto from Tasmin Little with the St Petersburg SO, Beethoven and Haydn from BBC New Generation Artists, the Consone Quartet, and Bach cantatas from Solomon's Knot.



Solomon's Knot return with JS Bach cantatas

newburyspringfestival.org.uk

BEETHOVEN 250



The multi-award-winning mezzo, Anna Huntley, visits Jaime Walton's festival

North York Moors Chamber Music Festival

August 9-22

Themed 'Revolution' for 2020, this chamber festival under the artistic director of cellist Jamie Walton this year explores the effects that revolution had upon composers' lives, most notably that of Beethoven who features in each concert throughout the fortnight and who managed, more than most, to encapsulate the concept of revolution itself. Further exploration of music influenced by the French, Russian and German revolutions, as well as both world wars, takes place in ten historic venues around the breathtaking National Park. A plethora of 30 festival regulars take to the stage including mezzo Anna Huntley, pianist Katya Apekisheva, clarinettist Matthew Hunt and Quartetto di Cremona who open the festival.

northyorkmoorsfestival.com

IF: Milton Keynes International Festival

July 17-26

Ten years old this year, this biennial festival presents 10 days of new commissions, outdoor and large-scale performance, live music, comedy, circus, family activities and free events. Artist-in-Residence for 2020 is Graeae's Artistic Director Jenny Sealey, who will be advising on the festival's inclusion and engagement programme. Highlights include a first opportunity to see work-in-progress *The Paradis Files*, a new opera by Errollyn Wallen about the life and career of the blind 18th-century composer Maria Theresia von Paradis, directed by Sealey working with Graeae.

ifmiltonkeynes.org

Music@Malling

September 21 - October 3

Held in historic venues in and around West Malling, Kent, Music@Malling presents a mix of classical, contemporary, jazz, world and vocal music. Classical highlights for 2020 include Six Brandenburgs/Six Commissions from Chamber Domaine directed by Thomas Kemp in Malling Abbey, vocal ensemble Tenebrae with medieval chant and the Tallis *Lamentations*, Biber's *Mystery Sonatas* from Kemp with harpsichordist Steve Devine and cellist Richard Harwood, and premieres from composers Brian Elias and Mark-Anthony Turnage.

musicatmallings.com

Nevill Holt Opera

June 10 - July 1

Fresh from its new 400-seat theatre winning the RIBA Stirling Prize

People's Vote 2019, this Leicestershire opera festival opens with Jonathan Bloxham conducting Manchester Camerata in a new production of Verdi's *La traviata* by Christopher Luscombe. Hot on its heels is the third opera in the festival's Mozart Da Ponte cycle: Artistic Director Nicholas Chalmers conducts the Royal Northern Sinfonia and a cast of young talent in a new production of *Don Giovanni* by Jack Furness.

nevillholtopera.co.uk

Norfolk and Norwich Festival

May 8-24

Seventeen days of music, theatre, literature, visual arts, circus, dance, theatre and free outdoor events begin with two St Andrew's Hall concerts: a programme by trumpeter Alison Balsom and the Britten Sinfonia spanning 300 years of composition from Purcell to John Woolrich, and Mahler's Symphony No 3 from Norwich Philharmonic Orchestra and Chorus. The Beethoven anniversary is also marked with a recital of Beethoven piano sonatas from Richard Goode in the John Innes Centre.

nnfestival.org.uk

North Norfolk Festival

August 5-15

Based in St Mary's Church, South Creake, the NNMF offers a rich selection of chamber concerts alongside masterclasses from pianist Melvyn Tan and founder viola player of the Chilingirian Quartet, Simon Rowland-Jones (joint Festival Director with Barry Cheeseman). Highlights for 2020 include baritone Andrea Mastroni

singing Schubert's *Winterreise* with pianist Iain Burnside. Also the festival's concluding all-Beethoven evening, which has the Carducci Quartet performing his quartets, followed by Benjamin Appl singing the song cycle *An die ferne Geliebte* in a new transcription for baritone and string quartet by Rowland-Jones. Further visiting artists include Trio Ondine, pianist Louis Schwizgebel, soprano Elizabeth Watts with pianist Sholto Kynoch, vocal ensemble The Marian Consort, and violinist Hugo Ticcianti.

northnorfolkmusicfestival.com

Opera Holland Park

June 2 - August 8

It's a season of firsts for OHP with its five new productions. Tchaikovsky's *Eugene Onegin* kicks things off, directed by Julia Burbach, with soprano Anush Hovhannisyan as Tatyana and baritone Samuel Dale Johnson as Onegin, all three making their festival debuts. Another OHP directorial debut is Natascha Metherell with Verdi's *Rigoletto*, with Stephen Gadd singing the title role and Anna Patalong as Gilda. There are also two operettas: Lehár's *The Merry Widow* and Gilbert and Sullivan's *The Pirates of Penzance* with Charles Court Opera, the first G & S operetta at Holland Park in 20 years. There are rarities too: the first major UK staging of Delius's only *verismo* opera, *Margot la Rouge*, presented in a double bill with Puccini's *Le Villi*. As ever, the City of London Sinfonia is the resident orchestra.

operahollandpark.com

The Oxford Lieder Festival

October 9-24

'Connections Across Time - A Brief History of Song' is this year's theme, exploring how music and poetry have collided across the centuries from the Renaissance through to the present day. Carolyn Sampson returns to perform a new song cycle by Oxford Lieder's Associate Composer Cheryl Frances-Hoad. Also worth catching is a co-commission with Heidelberger Frühling of a work by Iranian composer Mahdis Kashani exploring the poet Hafiz. Beethoven also features in the programming, placed in such a way as to highlight that he sits in a song tradition that has roots back to Bach. Tenor Ian Bostridge is Artist-in-Residence, with two concerts, a talk and a masterclass. Other singers include Lucy Crowe, James Gilchrist, Christoph Prégardien, Toby Spence, Camilla Tilling and Roderick Williams.

oxfordlieder.co.uk

Oxford May Music

April 30 - May 3

This unique festival, under the joint direction of violinist Jack Liebeck and particle physicist Professor

Brian Foster, blends musical and scientific excellence. The Beethoven anniversary is marked in fine form with the festival's first Saturday morning concert: Katya Apekisheva playing Beethoven piano sonatas. Beyond Beethoven, composers range from Venice to Rio, and from the contemporary to the Baroque. The other festival visitors are similarly diverse too, including world-leading accordionist James Crabb, the newly formed Salieca Piano Trio led by Jack Liebeck, and Nobel Laureate Venki Ramakrishnan talking about the ribosome.

oxfordmaymusic.co.uk

Oxford Piano Festival and Summer Academy

August 1-9

This festival, under the artistic directorship of Oxford Philharmonic Orchestra Music Director Marios Papadopoulos, welcomes some of the world's most distinguished pianists and teachers for a week-long series of concerts and masterclasses. Visiting pianists this year include Nelson Freire, Richard Goode, Alain Lefèvre, Elisabeth Leonskaja, Paul Lewis, George Li, Nikolai Lugansky and Menahem Pressler, Life President of the Oxford Philharmonic Orchestra.

oxfordphil.com/oxford-philharmonic/piano-festival

Passiontide at Merton

April 3-5

Based in the 13th-century chapel of Merton College, Oxford, and featuring its critically acclaimed chapel choir under the direction of Benjamin Nicholas, this sacred music festival is dominated by JS Bach this year, including a performance of the *St Matthew Passion* accompanied by Florilegium. Other highlights include Baroque violinist Bojan Čičić beginning a two-year project to perform the complete Biber Rosary Sonatas, and the festival finale featuring Pergolesi's *Stabat mater* and Buxtehude's *Membra Jesu nostri*, with Oxford period-instrument ensemble, Instruments of Time & Truth. Choral music sung during the liturgies includes Cecilia McDowall's *Adore te*, as well as motets by Pablo Casals, Bruckner and Gibbons, the Mass for Five Voices by Byrd, and Herbert Howells's *St Paul's Service*.

merton.ox.ac.uk/passiontide-merton-2020

Music at Paxton

July 17-26

The Picture Gallery at Paxton House, Berwick-upon-Tweed, in the Scottish Borders, is the intimate setting for 10 days of chamber music. This year's programme celebrates the magnificence of Paxton House and its beautiful countryside setting, and features



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some of Beethoven's finest chamber music. Pianist Imogen Cooper plays Beethoven's *Diabelli* Variations, and collaborates with Music at Paxton's Associate Ensemble, the Maxwell Quartet, for a performance of Dvořák's Piano Quintet. Tenor James Gilchrist sings Schubert's *Winterreise* with pianist Anna Tilbrook, and Steven Osborne plays a programme of Rachmaninov and Schubert. Among other visiting artists are Concerto Caledonia, soprano Elizabeth Watts with pianist Sholto Kynoch, the Brook Street Band, violinist Tamsin Waley-Cohen and the Gould Piano Trio.
musicatpaxton.co.uk

Peasmarsh Chamber Music Festival

June 25-28

Under the artistic direction of violinist Anthony Marwood and cellist Richard Lester, this rural East Sussex festival presents eight concerts over its four days, most of which take place in the ancient church of St Peter and St Paul in Peasmarsh, with an orchestral performance – this year by Britten Sinfonia – in St Mary's Church in Rye. Artists joining Marwood and Lester include the 2018 Naumburg International Violin Competition winner Grace Park, viola player and Borletti-Buitoni artist Eivind Ringstad, accordionist James Crabb, and the Navarra Quartet. Programme highlights include Sally Beamish's *Fanfare* and also her *Seavengers* concerto for violin, accordion and strings. There's also music by Haydn, Schubert, Britten, Korngold and others, plus an orchestral concert for local primary schoolchildren.
peasmarshfestival.co.uk

Perth Festival of the Arts

May 21-30

This is one of Scotland's leading independent arts festivals, taking place in iconic venues around the city of Perth. Classical highlights for 2020 are the opening concert with Aurora Orchestra performing Beethoven's *Eroica* Symphony and Mendelssohn's Violin Concerto with soloist Nicola Benedetti. There's also a programme of Bach and Bruckner in St John's Kirk of Perth from vocal ensemble Tenebrae, a recital by violinist Tasmin Little and pianist John Lenahan, and the festival closing concert from the Academy of St Martin in the Fields led by Tomo Keller, its programme to include Arnold's Sinfonietta No 1 and Haydn's C major Cello Concerto with soloist Laura van de Heijden.
perthfestival.co.uk

Petworth Festival

July 14 – August 1

Artists for 2020 include violinist Tasmin Little, cello and piano duo, siblings Sheku and Isata Kanneh-

Mason, soprano Susan Bullock and the London Mozart Players. For book lovers, there's also the Petworth Festival Literary Week from October 24 to November 1.
petworthfestival.org.uk

Presteigne Festival

August 27 – September 1

This Powys-Herefordshire border festival centred around contemporary repertoire continues its advocacy of British music this year with Tarik O'Regan as Composer-in-Residence, whose festival commission is a saxophone concerto for Amy Dickson. Seven further commissions are from Martin Butler, Gary Carpenter, Amelia Clarkson, Ninfea Cruttwell-Reade, Joseph Phibbs, Emma-Ruth Richards and Robin Haigh. The festival's partnership with Nova Music Opera continues with a triple-bill of Janáček's *The Diary of One Who Disappeared*, Judith Weir's *King Harald's Saga*, and the aforementioned commission from Cruttwell-Reade. Choir in Residence is the Bath Camerata, conducted by its director Benjamin Goodson, and the Festival Orchestra performs three concerts under Festival Director George Vass.
presteignefestival.com

Proms at St Jude's

June 27 – July 5

This North London festival is based in the impressive Lutyens-designed church, St Jude's, Hampstead Garden Suburb. Highlights include Mahler's *Das Lied von der Erde* from Aurora Orchestra with soloists Dame Sarah Connolly and Andrew Staples, a programme from vocal ensemble Voces8 to include a world premiere alongside music from Tallis to Rachmaninov, Mendelssohn and Schubert from Orchestra Nova under George Vass, gospel music from The Kingdom Choir, and Beethoven quartets from the Endellion Quartet.
promsatstjudes.org.uk

Roman River Festival

April 23 – 25

The theme is 'The Passionate Quartet: Love, loss and longing', with string quartets by Beethoven, Janáček and Glass.
romanrivermusic.org.uk

Ryedale Festival

July 10-26

The 2020 Ryedale Festival celebrates the Beethoven 250 anniversary with a complete cycle of his string quartets by the Brodsky, Albion, Heath, Consone and Dudok quartets, Ensemble 360, and the Endellion quartet in what will be its last ever appearance. Artists-in-Residence include South African cellist Abel Selacoe, and the organist and conductor Anna Lapwood. There's also a festival

residency for Richard Egarr and his San Francisco-based group, Philharmonia Baroque. Eamonn Dougan conducts a new production of Handel's *Acis and Galatea*. Visiting orchestras include the Orchestra of Opera North and the BBC Big Band. Visiting soloists include pianist Martin James Bartlett, singers Ian Bostridge and Carolyn Sampson, and violinists Alina Ibragimova and Rachel Podger. Other events include Dame Janet Baker in conversation.
ryedalefestival.com

Salisbury International Arts Festival

May 22 - June 6

Nestling within a packed programme of plays and talks are several musical events, including Górecki's *Symphony of Sorrowful Songs* from the Paraorchestra under Charles Hazlewood, a recital from the Carducci Quartet, and an evening with opera star Willard White tracing the history of rag, blues and other jazz forms.
wiltshirecreative.co.uk

Sherborne Abbey Festival

May 1-6

Concerts, workshops, recitals and performances from artists including soprano Kate Royal and the Sherborne Festival Orchestra.
sherborneabbeyfestival.org

Southern Cathedrals Festival

July 17-19

Winchester Cathedral hosts the 2020 edition of this festival that moves around the cathedrals of Southern England, featuring their combined choirs. Highlights include the boy choristers and Gentlemen of the three cathedrals performing Rachmaninov's *Magnificat* and *Nunc Dimittis*, and Chilcott's *Mass in Blue*.
southerncathedralsfestival.org.uk

Southwell Music Festival

August 26-31

This festival under the artistic direction of baritone Marcus Farnsworth takes place in and around Nottinghamshire's Norman cathedral over the August Bank Holiday weekend. This year's highlights, performed by the festival ensemble comprised of professional singers and players, celebrates Beethoven's 250th anniversary with a mix of chamber, choral and orchestral music. Beethoven's own works include the *Choral* Symphony, while his influence on other composers is explored via Schubert, plus his lesser-known contemporaries and successors.
southwellmusicfestival.com

St Andrews Voices

October 15-18

Scotland's only festival devoted to the voice offers everything from

international names through to a dementia-friendly show. Major names for 2020 include The Sixteen under the direction of Harry Christophers with their 'Queen of Heaven' programme, the second year of the festival's three-year partnership with award-winning light projection artists Luxmuralis, and a new interpretation of Schubert's *Winterreise* interspersed with extracts from the diary of Robert Falcon Scott, written during his first expedition to the Antarctic.
standrewsvoices.com

St Endellion Summer Festival

July 28 – August 8

Under the artistic direction of tenor Mark Padmore, this is our guide's only Cornish festival, with the majority of its concerts held in St Endellion Church. This year's opera is Wagner's *The Flying Dutchman*, Duncan Ward conducting a cast including Rachel Nicholls and Peter Hoare. Ward also conducts a Truro Cathedral performance of Haydn's *The Seasons*, with Padmore himself as one of the soloists. The opening concert is another highlight, Martyn Brabbins conducting Imogen Cooper in Mozart's Piano Concerto in C, K503, followed by Beethoven's Mass in C. Beethoven also features in chamber form, including Padmore and Cooper performing his song cycle, *An die ferne Geliebte*.
endellionfestivals.org.uk

St Magnus International Festival

June 19-25

Under the directorship of Scottish composer Alasdair Nicolson, this Orkney festival whose 1977 founding group included Peter Maxwell Davies uses venues throughout the Orcadian landscape including the medieval Cathedral of St Magnus in Kirkwall, and further-flung venues such as on the islands of Westray and Hoy. The 2020 festival celebrates Scotland's Year of Coasts and Waters via dance, choral and chamber music from Baroque through to Contemporary, including a special Sea Promenade in St Magnus Cathedral. Plus theatre, lectures, excursions and more. Visiting artists include vocal ensemble Sonoro, the Kugoni Trio, the Hebrides Ensemble, recorder player Tabea Debus, pianist Roman Kosyakov and the Nova Guitar Duo.
stmagnusfestival.com

Stamford International Music Festival

May 15-17

Returning to Stamford for its third year, this Lincolnshire festival organised by violinist Freya Goldmark runs over a long weekend with the aim of presenting some of the greatest works of chamber music, performed by a group of

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Sheku Kanneh-Mason
 Photo: Jake Turley

high-level young musicians at the start of their professional solo, chamber and orchestral careers. Entry is free to under-16s. This year's highlights include Schoenberg's *Verklärte Nacht*, Beethoven's Septet and Tippett's String Quartet No 2. simfestival.com

Stour Music Festival

June 19-28

Founded by the countertenor Alfred Deller in 1962 and then for 45 years under the artistic directorship of his son Mark, this annual festival devoted to early music takes place in the pilgrim church of All Saints' Boughton Aluph, Kent. This year marks the first festival under the new artistic direction of I Fagiolini's Robert Hollingworth. Highlights include William Lyons directing *The Count and the Duke*, a big-band tribute to Early Music pioneer David Munrow. There is also a Gabrieli Extravaganza with Hollingworth's own choir from the University of York, The 24, plus tenor Nicholas Mulroy and baritone Greg Skidmore. stourmusic.org.uk

Swaledale Festival

May 23 - June 6

This Yorkshire Dales festival always has a strong classical offering programmed around other musical genres, while celebrating its local culture by the way of brass bands, folk music and guided walks. Classical highlights for 2020 include violinist Fenella Humphreys performing Mozart, as well as Vivaldi's *The Four Seasons* with the European Union Chamber Orchestra, another opportunity to see Voces8 with the Baroque violinist Rachel Podger for their acclaimed Guardian Angel programme, and Schubert's Quintet from the Brodsky Quartet joining forces with cellist Laura van de Heijden. Other visiting artists include all eight cellos from the Hallé Orchestra, the Sacconi Quartet, the Carducci Quartet, pianist Freddy Kempf and oboist Nicholas Daniel. swalefest.org

Thaxted Festival

June 19 - July 12

Hosted by Thaxted Parish Church, this festival presents four weekends of music-making featuring repertoire to include Elgar's Cello Concerto, Purcell's *Dido and Aeneas*, Gilbert and Sullivan's *The Mikado* and Vivaldi's *The Four Seasons*. Headlining the soloists this year are pianist Benjamin Grosvenor, baritone Roderick Williams and cellist Guy Johnston. The list of visiting ensembles is also impressive, featuring the Brodsky Quartet, the Armonico Consort, The King's Men, pupils of the Yehudi Menuhin School, and the Katona Twins. Jazz club Ronnie Scott's is also back for its

annual visit. There's also a family concert, and a recital on the church's famous Lincoln Organ. thaxtedfestival.co.uk

Three Choirs Festival

July 25 - August 1

It's Worcester's turn to host this historic festival and its orchestra-in-residence, the Philharmonia. 'Voyage' is a strong theme for 2020, marking the 400th anniversary of the Mayflower leaving England for the USA. American composers include Nico Muhly, whose *Senex puerum portabat* is on a programme with Elgar's *The Music Makers*. John Adams's *Short Ride in a Fast Machine* features in a programme alongside the premiere of *Lux Lucis*, a festival commission by Gabriel Jackson. Colin Matthews's *The Great Journey*, about the Spanish Conquest's voyage to South America, is performed by baritone Roderick Williams and the Philharmonia Chamber Players under Adrian Partington. Visiting vocal ensembles include The Marian Consort and the Orlando Consort. Violinist Fenella Humphreys performs one of the Festival Lates. 3choirs.org

Tilford Bach Festival

June 5-7

Hosted by All Saints' Church, Tilford in Surrey, this Baroque-focused festival presents JS Bach's Mass in B minor as its central feature for 2020, Artistic Director Adrian Butterfield directing the Pegasus Choir with soloists Joanne Lunn, Daniel Taylor, Charles Daniels and Edward Grint. Another highlight is the opening concert led by former Tilford Music Director Laurence Cummings, who joins the London Handel Players in a concerto programme of JS Bach, Vivaldi and Leclair, Cummings pairing with harpsichordist Silas Wollston for Bach two-harpsichord concertos, and Triple Concerto BWV1044 performed with flautist Rachel Brown, and Butterfield on violin. Other highlights include a Saturday lunchtime concert celebrating the 300th anniversary of Bach's solo Sonatas and Partitas for violin. sites.google.com/view/all-saints-tilford/whats-on/tilford-bach-festival-2020

The Two Moors Festival

September 25-27

October 2-4

The two moors of this festival's title are Dartmoor and Exmoor National Park, and recent years have seen it present a strong cast of national and international musicians, both rising and established. Programmes for 2020 weren't available as we went to press, but note that rather than the usual 10 days the festival will take place over two weekends. twomoorsfestival.co.uk

Ulverston International Music Festival

June 19-27

The headline artists for this Lake District festival's 2020 edition are percussionist Evelyn Glennie, Welsh harpist Catrin Finch with Senegalese kora player Seckou Keita, and violinist Jennifer Pike in recital with pianist Martin Roscoe. Also on stage is the festival's Artistic Director, pianist Anthony Hewitt, performing Beethoven's Piano Concerto No 4 with the Royal Northern Sinfonia. Other highlights include the Sacconi String Quartet, the Gwilym Simcock Trio, rising young cellist Jamal Aliyev, and a 'Come and Sing' project open to all singers, featuring the Duruflé Requiem and Schubert's Mass in G. ulverstonmusicfestival.co.uk

Vale of Glamorgan Festival

May 15-22

This South Wales festival aims to bring the best new classical music to venues such as Penarth Pier Pavilion, Llandaff Cathedral and St Donat's Castle grounds, with the ticketed indoor events complemented by free outdoor performances and sound installations. This aim of this year's edition is to take audiences on a journey across the fragile landscapes of our changing world. There are a pair of featured composers this year: Wales's own Huw Watkins, and America's creator of spectacular soundscapes, John Luther Adams, whose Pulitzer-winning *Become Ocean* concludes the festival, performed by the BBC Orchestra of Wales. Watkins meanwhile will perform his own piano music in a concert with the Carducci Quartet. Other visiting artists include Theatre of Voices. valeofglamorganfestival.org.uk

Voces8 International Summer School and Festival

July 27 - August 1

Based in Dorset's 12th-century Milton Abbey and under the artistic direction of Barnaby Smith, vocal group Voces8's festival presents a week of performances running in tandem with a musical summer school open to people from all walks of life, which this year culminates in a performance of Handel's *Israel in Egypt* with the Academy of Ancient Music. Another major choral work presented this year is Bach's Mass in B Minor, featuring the combined forces of Voces8, fellow UK *a cappella* group Apollo5, the Voces8 Scholars and the Academy of Ancient Music. Voces8 also present an *a cappella* programme, while other highlights include the UK premiere of Taylor Davis's Mass, and Beethoven's Symphony No 5 performed by the Festival Orchestra. voces8.foundation/miltonabbey

Waterperry Opera Festival

August 13-16

Hosted by Oxfordshire's Waterperry House and Gardens in its open air amphitheatre, this relatively new festival aims to bridge the gap between performer and spectator through immersive productions and engaging participatory events such as talks, workshops and masterclasses. This year's two main productions are Donizetti's *The Elixir of Love*, conducted by Festival Music Director Bertie Baigent and directed by Jamie Manton, and Purcell's *Dido and Aeneas*, conducted by Emily Hooker and directed by Emma Doherty. Family matinees are Humperdinck's *Hansel and Gretel* and Prokofiev's *Peter and the Wolf*. The 2020 Young Artist Production meanwhile is Jonathan Dove's short opera, *Greed, A Deadly Sin in Six Minutes*. waterperryoperafestival.co.uk

West Meon Festival

September 10-13

The Hampshire village of West Meon hosts this festival from the musicians of the Primrose Piano Quartet and guests, who present chamber music ranging from solos to sextets over the course of a long weekend. The festival celebrates its 10th anniversary this year with the addition of an extra concert on the Thursday evening. Guests include clarinettist Michael Collins, horn player Stephen Stirling, violinist Jonathan Stone and cellist Kirsten Jenson. There are also three notable young musicians: 2018 Hastings International Piano Concerto Competition winner Roman Kosyakov, cellist Maxim Calver, who won the 2018 BBC Young Musician String Section, and guitarist Laura Snowden. westmeonmusic.co.uk

York Early Music Festival

July 3-11

'Method and Madness' is this year's theme from the UK's largest festival of music written before 1750, which opens with a concert of 17th-century English tavern music from the Barokksolistene led by Norwegian violinist Bjarte Eike. Further highlights include vocal ensemble Voces Suaves singing music by Monteverdi and his contemporaries, and a performance of Handel's opera *Orlando* featuring soprano Carolyn Sampson and mezzo Helen Charlston. Other visiting artists include 2015 York Early Music International Young Artists Competition winners and BBC New Generation Artists, the Consone Quartet, and countertenor Iestyn Davies singing with the Dunedin Consort led by John Butt. There's also a visit from the intriguing sounding Society for Strange and Ancient Instruments. ncem.co.uk/yemf

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EUROPE FESTIVALS

Aix en Provence Festival

June 30 - July 18

It's impossible to do justice in these pages to the dizzying amount of choice at Provence's major opera festival this year. All five featured operas are new productions, including the world premiere of Kaija Saariaho's *Innocence*, featuring Susanna Mälkki conducting the London Symphony Orchestra, and soloists Sandrine Piau, Anna Prohaska and Magdalena Kožená. Following this is Berg's *Wozzeck*, Mozart's *Così fan tutte*, Rimsky-Korsakov's *The Golden Cockerel*, and Monteverdi's *Orfeo* and *The Coronation of Poppea*. There are linked recitals from the stars of those operas: baritone Christian Gerhaher complements the title-role in *Wozzeck* with a programme of Berg, Schubert and Fauré, while soprano Sabine Devieilhe couples Chemakha in *The Golden Cockerel* with Mozart and Strauss. The packed concerts programme also includes a Beethoven anniversary series featuring Thomas Hengelbrock making his festival debut at the head of his Balthasar Neumann Ensemble with the Fifth and Sixth symphonies, and the late string quartets from the Casals Quartet. festival-aix.com

Festival de Pâques, Aix-en-Provence

April 4-19

This major Provençal Easter festival under the artistic direction of violinist Renaud Capuçon is looking as starry as usual this year. The two themes for 2020 are 'Beethoven' and 'Cello français', and they collide for Beethoven's complete cello sonatas from eight French cellists

including Marc Coppey, Anne Gastinel and Jérôme Pernoo. More Beethoven highlights come via string quartets from Quatuor Ébène, the *Missa solemnis* from Le Cercle de l'Harmonie under Jérémie Rhorer, and Capuçon performing the *Kreutzer* Sonata with Martha Argerich. Capuçon's own concerts also include Tchaikovsky's Violin Concerto on the opening night with Alain Altinoglu and La Monnaie Symphony Orchestra. This year's traditional Good Friday Bach *St John Passion*, meanwhile, is from Marc Minkowski and Les Musiciens du Louvre. festivalpaques.com/en/

Festival d'Auvers-sur-Oise

May 3 - July 8

This festival on the outskirts of Paris presents major artists alongside a generous young artist series. This year is its 40th anniversary, and among the major names visiting are pianists Khatia Buniatishvili and Denis Matsuev, Ensemble Jupiter, Insula Orchestra and La Cetra Barockorchester Basel. Rising stars include BBC New Generation Artist cellist Anastasia Kobekina, whose concerts include a recital with guitarist Thibaut Garcia. Also appearing are pianist Luka Okros, recorder quintet Consort Brouillamini and pianist Dmitry Kalashnikov. Composer-in-Residence is Thierry Escaich, whose concerts include the world premiere of an orchestral work; he also performs an organ and piano recital himself in the gothic Église de Notre-Dame d'Auvers-sur-Oise, interspersed with readings by actress Julie Depardieu. festival-auvers.com

Festival d'Opéra Baroque et romantique de Beaune

July 10 - August 2

This Burgundy period-performance opera festival, running over four weekends, is hosted by Beaune's historic Hospices de Beaune almshouse with its famous tiled roof, and the Basilique de Notre-Dame. This year's offerings include concert performances of Mozart's *Die Zauberflöte* from Jérémie Rhorer leading Le Cercle de l'Harmonie, Salieri's *Armida* from Christophe Rousset and Les Talens Lyriques, and Vivaldi's *L'Olimpiade* from Jean-Christophe Spinosi and Ensemble Matheus. There's also William Christie and director Robert Carsen's *pasticcio* of 17th- and 18th-century melodies, *Tell Me the Truth About Love*, starring mezzo Lea Desandre and countertenor Jakub Józef Orliński. Among the recitalists are countertenor Andreas Scholl, and sopranos Chiara Skerath and Mari Eriksmoen, while Artists-in-residence La Chapelle Harmonique, led by Valentin Tournet, perform the complete Bach motets. festivalbeaune.com/

Festival Berlioz

August 18-30

Held in Hector Berlioz's birth town of La Côte-Saint-André near Grenoble, with main concerts in the hilltop Château Louis XI, this festival always features an array of top French orchestras and musicians. Themed Berlioz and the Musical Mediterraneans for 2020, the festival focuses on the composer's rich musical associations with the Mediterranean via highlights such as the second part of *Les Troyens*, performed by a period-instrument youth orchestra conducted by François-Xavier Roth, and John Eliot Gardiner and his Orchestre Révolutionnaire et Romantique who provide an evening of Berlioz's Italian music. Also on the programme is the sacred oratorio *L'Enfance du Christ*. festivalberlioz.com

Bergen International Festival

May 20 - June 3

The largest curated festival for music and performing arts in the Nordic countries, the Bergen International Festival presents more than 250 events for 2020, beginning with an opening-night performance of Strauss's *Salome* directed by Lloyd Wood, with Edward Gardner conducting the Bergen Philharmonic Orchestra (BPO) and Bergen National Opera, and starring Lithuanian soprano Ausrine Stundytė making her Bergen debut. Other highlights include William Christie with Les Arts Florissants and a Bergen solo recital

debut by Gramophone Awards 2019 Artist of the Year Víkingur Ólafsson, playing Debussy and Rameau. In addition, Ólafsson plays the Grieg Piano Concerto with the BPO in a programme also featuring the Brahms Double Concerto from violinist Vilde Frang and cellist Nicolas Altstaedt. There is also a Romantic-era recital from violinist Henning Kraggerud and pianist Christian Ihle Hadland. fib.no

Bregenz Festival

July 22 - August 23

A scenic standout for its picturesque lake stage, this festival with the Vienna Symphony Orchestra as its resident ensemble tops 2020 with the return of its popular production of Verdi's *Rigoletto*, directed by Philipp Stölzl, and conducted by Enrique Mazzola and Daniele Squeo. As for the indoor Festspielhaus, this hosts Olivier Tambosi's production of Boito's *Nero*, conducted by Dirk Kaftan. Meanwhile the Kornmarkt Theater presents three very contrasting offerings: the world premiere of L'ubica Čekovská's festival-commissioned *opera buffa*, *Impresario Dotcom*, Haydn's *Armida* with the young singers of Bregenz Opera Studio, and *Beethoven Goes Africa* from Bochabela String Orchestra and Friends. Orchestral performances include the Austrian premiere of Thomas Larcher's Symphony No 3 paired with Beethoven's *Egmont* Overture. bregenzfestspiele.com

Budapest Festival, Bruges

June 4-7

Hosted by the Concertgebouw Brugge, this is a four-day visit by the Budapest Festival Orchestra under its director Iván Fischer. This year's programme is themed 'The Many Sides of Iván Fischer'. One highlight is the opening concert featuring Bruch's Violin Concerto with soloist Ning Feng. concertgebouw.be/en/budapest-festival-2020

Casa de Mateus

August 14-22

The Casa de Mateus International Music Courses on Baroque performance take place at one of Portugal's most beautiful 18th-century palaces, and while the pedagogical aspect of this festival is its main *raison d'être*, public concerts are very much part of its model. The programme for this 30th edition will be wide-ranging, covering voice and vocal ensemble, Baroque violin, cello and oboe, and recorder and harpsichord. casademateus.com

BEETHOVEN 250

Beethovenfest Bonn

September 4-27

Unsurprisingly, the Beethovenfest Bonn is going large on the Beethoven anniversary this year, and with considerable style. Themed 'Rise Again, Yes, Rise Again', the September festival opens with Marek Janowski conducting the Chorus and Orchestra of the Bayreuth Festival in the Ninth Symphony. Also worth catching is all four *Leonore*-themed operas which are staged for the first time in Bonn, beginning with Beethoven's own *Fidelio* via both a new production by Volker Lösch for the Beethoven Orchester Bonn, and another in miniature form from Salzburg Marionette Theatre. These are followed by the operas of Ferdinando Paër, Johann Simon Mayr and Pierre Gaveaux. Other visiting artists and ensembles meanwhile include Marianne Crebassa, violinists Renaud Capuçon and Daniel Hope, Concerto Köln, pianist Igor Levit, conductor Ádám Fischer, the Kammerorchester Basel and the Mahler Chamber Orchestra. beethovenfest.de



Ádám Fischer visits Beethovenfest Bonn

BEETHOVEN 250

Dresden Music Festival

May 12 – June 12

Under the artistic direction of cellist Jan Vogler, this festival's theme for 2020 is 'Inspiration Nature' and is launched by the New York Philharmonic under Jaap van Zweden, the programme to include Mozart's Piano Concerto No 25 with Daniil Trifonov. The Beethoven anniversary gets its own series, with one eye-catching event a *Pastoral*-themed 'Workshop Concert' from the Dresden Festival Orchestra under Ivor Bolton, moderated by Vogler. Another is the world premiere of a Beethoven-inspired triple concerto by Swiss composer William Blank, performed by Vogler, violinist Mira Wang and clarinettist Daniel Ottensamer. There's also a quartet cycle shared between the Calidore Quartet, Quatuor Van Kuijk and the Novus Quartet, plus the *Archduke* Trio from the Gidon Kremer Trio.

musikfestspiele.com


Ivor Bolton conducts a 'Pastoral' workshop

Chorégies d'Orange

June 19 – August 1

With performances staged in the 900-seat ancient Roman Théâtre Antique d'Orange near Avignon, Europe's oldest festival has an awe-inspiring backdrop, and performances to match. Saint-Saëns's *Samson et Dalila* is the first of this year's two operas, Yves Abel conducting Roberto Alagna and Marie-Nicole Lemieux in the title roles, with the Orchestre Philharmonique de Radio France. The second is Verdi's *La forza del destino*, Nicola Luisotti conducting the Orchestre National de France and a cast including Nicola Ulivieri as the Marquis de Calatrava and Eva Maria Westbroek as Donna Leonora. Concerts include Vivaldi, Sedlar and Rimsky-Korsakov from violinist Nemanja Radulović with Ensemble Double Sens; Myung Whung Chung conducting the Orchestre Philharmonique de Radio France in a programme featuring Brahms's Violin Concerto with Maxim Vengerov; and mezzo Cecilia Bartoli with Les Musiciens du Prince – Monaco.

choregies.fr

Göttingen International Handel Festival

May 20 – June 1

Under the artistic direction of Laurence Cummings, and boasting a resident orchestra that attracts top Baroque musicians from all over the world, the festival celebrates its centenary this year, and is doing so in grand style by presenting all 42 of Handel's operas in different ways including staged productions, concert performances, crossover concerts and libretto readings, with former Artistic Director Nicholas McGegan, and future Artistic Director George Petrou also participating. The main production directed by Cummings this year is *Rodelinda*, while there are concert versions of *Alessandro*, *Ariodante*,

Publio Cornelio Scipione, *Xerxes* and *Rinaldo*. Visiting singers include countertenor Bejun Mehta, alto Sonia Prina and soprano Julia Lehzneva. Other events include chamber concerts in surrounding villages, and the Göttingen Handel Competition for young ensembles.

haendel-festspiele.de/en

Gstaad Menuhin Festival

July 17 – September 6

Themed 'Vienna' in honour of the city that Beethoven made his home, over 20 concerts at this Saanenland festival are either partially or entirely dedicated to Beethoven's music this year. Highlights include violinist Renaud Capuçon playing Beethoven's Romances, and the *Diabelli* Variations from pianist Mitsuko Uchida. The first of this year's two operas meanwhile is the previously mentioned *Fidelio* collaboration with Grafenegg Festival starring Jonas Kaufmann. The other is Mozart's *The Magic Flute*. Artist-in-Residence is clarinettist Andreas Ottensamer, who performs with cellist Sol Gabetta, among others. Further orchestral highlights include Seong-Jin Cho in Rachmaninov's Piano Concerto No 2 with the Gstaad Festival Orchestra under Jaap van Zweden, while church recitals include from singers Elsa Dreisig and Daniel Behle, pianists András Schiff, Grigory Sokolov and Christian Zacharias, and the Casals, Chiaroscuro, Carmina and Hagen Quartets.

gstaadmenuhinfestival.ch

Hamburg International Music Festival

April 24 – May 25

This festival hosted by the Elbphilharmonie is titled 'Believe' for 2020, exploring that theme via 35 events spanning 400 years of music. For example, faith and Christianity are explored through performances including the festival's centrepiece:

Messiaen's *Saint François d'Assise*, with Kent Nagano leading the Philharmonisches Staatsorchester, a huge choir, and Anna Prohaska singing the Angel. Also on the bill are Poulenc's *Stabat mater* from Yannick Nézet-Séguin and the Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra and Choir, and the opening concert from Alan Gilbert and the NDR Elbphilharmonie Orchestra of Sofia Gubaidulina's *The Rider on the White Horse*. The Believe theme is also explored via the self-confidence of Beethoven, whose Lieder are sung by Matthias Goerne accompanied by Jan Lisiecki. elbphilharmonie.de/en/blog/hamburg-international-music-festival-2020-believe/290

Heidenheim Opera Festival

May 29 – August 2

The theme for the 2020 edition is 'Power', as the festival's Verdi series continues with *Don Carlo*, its cast to include Leah Gordon and Lionel Lothe, and *I due Foscari* with a cast to include Ania Jeruc. The operas are accompanied respectively by the two festival ensembles, the Stuttgart Philharmonic and the Cappella Aquileia under the direction of Artistic Director Marcus Bosch, joined by the Czech Philharmonic Choir Brno. Open-air symphonic concerts hosted by medieval Hellenstein Castle include works by Beethoven, Orff and Bernstein, and guest ensembles include the Deutsche Staatsphilharmonie Rheinland-Pfalz with violinist-conductor Julian Rachlin, and the NDR Big Band with Cuban composer, band leader and pianist Omar Sousa. opernfestspiele.de

Herrenchiemsee Festival

July 14–26

This year marks the 20th anniversary of this Bavarian festival based in Herrenchiemsee Castle's Spiegelsaal and the monastery of the Fraueninsel. Four concerts

are devoted to Beethoven, with the programme featuring his symphonies, concertos and chamber works. Other major works being performed are Monteverdi's *Vespro della Beata Vergine*.

herrenchiemsee-festspiele.de

Incontri in Terra di Siena

July 21–29

Under the artistic direction of pianist Alessio Bax, this Tuscan festival is based at the Villa La Foce estate with its famous gardens. 2020 opens with Daniele Rustioni leading the Orchestra della Toscana in a programme to include flügelhorn player Sergei Nakariakov with Tchaikovsky's *Variations on a Rococo Theme*, violinist Francesca Dego with Mozart's Violin Concerto No 2, and Bax himself with Grieg's Piano Concerto. Further highlights include pianist Nelson Goerner making his festival debut, and Emmanuel Pahud performing the world premieres of two pieces for solo flute by Eric Montalbet and Nicolas Bacri. Other artists making their festival debuts include mandolin player Avi Avital and soprano Chen Reiss, while returning artists include violinist Henning Kraggerud, viola player Lawrence Power and cellist Paul Watkins. itslafoce.org

Innsbruck Festival of Early Music

July 14 – August 30

This early music festival in the capital of Austria's Tyrol is a great place to hear interesting programmes performed by period-performance artists less regularly seen on UK or US shores. It also hosts the annual Cesti Competition for Baroque Singers. This year is opened in the Spanish Hall of Ambras Castle by Al Ayre Español playing trio sonatas by Handel and Corelli. Other highlights include the six

BEETHOVEN 250

Grafenegg Festival

August 14 – September 6

Under the artistic direction of pianist Rudolf Buchbinder, this 'Austrian Tanglewood' takes place in the grounds of Grafenegg Castle. The Beethoven anniversary features strongly, starting with the opening performance of *Missa solemnis* for which the resident Tonkünstler Orchestra under Yutaka Sado is joined by the Arnold Schoenberg Choir and soloists Pretty Yende, Kate Lindsey, Klaus Florian Vogt and Jongmin Park. There's a concert performance of *Fidelio* in collaboration with the Menuhin Festival, Jaap van Zweden conducting the Gstaad Festival Orchestra and a cast starring Jonas Kaufmann; plus the Triple Concerto from the St Petersburg Philharmonic, for which Buchbinder himself is joined by violinist Emmanuel Tjeknavorian and cellist Harriet Krijgh. Composer-in-Residence is Konstantia Gourzi, whose festival commissions include a trumpet concerto for Alison Balsom. grafenegg.com



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A FIVE NIGHT HOLIDAY | 2 SEPTEMBER 2020

Grafenegg's celebrated festival in Lower Austria, just one hour from Vienna, runs throughout the summer and always closes with a feast of music-making. Concerts are held in the architecturally dramatic, and acoustically excellent, Wolkenturm, on the Metternich estate.

For 2020, Austrian pianist and Director of the Festival, Rudolf Buchbinder, has recruited the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra, the Chamber Orchestra of Europe, the Tonkünstler Orchestra and the Orchestra Mozart. Staying at the 4★ Steigenberger Hotel in Krems, we shall visit the art gallery which holds more than 40 works by Egon Schiele, who was born in nearby Tulln, and go to the village of Kirchstetten, close to St. Pölten.



Price from £2,956 per person for five nights including flights, accommodation with breakfast, one lunch, five dinners, tickets for five concerts, all sightseeing, entrance fees and gratuities and the services of the Kirker Tour Leader.

No single supplement.

THE VERDI FESTIVAL IN PARMA

A SIX NIGHT HOLIDAY | 28 SEPTEMBER 2020

The annual Verdi Festival takes place in one of Italy's most beautiful historic cities, Parma. It is here in the countryside around Parma that Verdi was born, grew up and lived for much of his life.

The special charm of Parma's Verdi Festival is that performances take place not just in the Teatro Regio, but also at the Teatro Verdi in Busseto, and this year's performances include *Macbeth* (French version), *Rigoletto* and *I Lombardi alla prima crociata*. We will be based at the 4★ Mercure Parma Stendhal and there will be visits to the important art collection at the Palazzo della Pilotta, the small town of Busseto, where we shall see the Villa Verdi and the Museo Nazionale Giuseppe Verdi, and historic Cremona.

Price from £2,949 per person (single supp. £480) for six nights including flights, accommodation with breakfast, three lunches, two dinners, tickets for three performances (some seats may be in boxes), all sightseeing, entrance fees and gratuities and the services of the Kirker Tour Leader.



THE 21ST SIBELIUS FESTIVAL IN LAHTI

A FOUR NIGHT HOLIDAY | 14 OCTOBER 2020

The annual Sibelius Festival in Lahti is held every autumn in the magnificent 1,200 seater Sibelius Hall on the shores of Lake Vesijärvi; it is one of the most important cultural events in Finland.

The 2020 Sibelius Festival will include performances of all seven symphonies written by Sibelius. His first symphony was performed in 1899 and the seventh, his last, in 1924. We also include a full programme of sightseeing, including visits to Hämeenlinna, where Jean Sibelius was born, Lake Tuusula and Ainola, the house where Sibelius and his wife lived. We stay at the centrally located 4★ Sokos Hotel Lahden Seurahuone for the duration of the holiday.



Price from £1,897 per person (single supp. £298) for four nights including flights, accommodation with breakfast, three lunches, four dinners, tickets for three performances, all sightseeing, entrance fees and gratuities and the services of the Kirker Tour Leader.

THE PUCCINI OPERA FESTIVAL

A FIVE NIGHT HOLIDAY | 5 AUGUST 2020

Giacomo Puccini was born into a musical family in Lucca on 22 December 1858, and each summer his operas are performed in nearby Torre del Lago on the peaceful shores of Lake Massaciuccoli.

Our holiday includes three performances and the operas this summer are *Manon Lescaut*, *Turandot* and *La bohème*. We stay at the 3★ Albergo Celide, just outside Lucca's magnificent walls and from here we shall enjoy a walking tour, including a visit to the house where Puccini was born. Outside of Lucca we shall drive to the popular seaside resort of Viareggio, and Pistoia, a lovely small town whose fortunes were eclipsed by its more powerful and wealthier neighbours, Lucca and Florence. A visit to two great Tuscan gardens – the Villa Reale in Marlia and the Villa Garzoni – is also included.

Price from £2,298 per person (single supp. £397) for five nights including flights, accommodation with breakfast, four dinners, tickets for three operas, one concert ticket, all sightseeing, entrance fees and gratuities and the services of the Kirker Tour Leader.



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intermedi composed for Girolamo Bargagli's play *La pellegrina* (written in 1589 for a Medici wedding) from period orchestra La Chimera, vocal ensembles Coro Voz Latina and NovoCanto, soprano Alicia Amo and tenor Valerio Contaldo, and opera productions of Ferdinando Paër's *Leonora* and Alessandro Melani's *L'empio punito*.

altemusik.at/en

Istanbul Music Festival

June 2-25

Themed 'The Enlightened World of Beethoven', the festival opens with Tekfen Philharmonic Orchestra joined by violinist Stella Chen, winner of the 2019 Queen Elisabeth International Violin Competition. Contemporary music continues to be strongly championed, with three festival commissions, two world premieres and one Turkish premiere. Artists include this year's recipient of the festival's Lifetime Achievement Award, cellist and conductor Alexander Rudin. Pianists İdil Biret, Emmanuel Ax and Víkingur Ólafsson, also feature, as well as percussionist Evelyn Glennie, baritone Thomas Hampson, harpsichordist Mahan Esfahani, the Berlin Konzerthaus Orchestra, Staatskapelle Berlin and Orchester Wiener Akademie.

muzik.iksv.org

Itinéraire Baroque

July 30 - August 2

Set in the Northern Dordogne region of Périgord Vert, harpsichordist and conductor Ton Koopman's festival celebrates both Baroque music and the Romanesque architecture of the area. This year's extended weekend of concerts has a number of themes, including the musical contributions of women as both composers and patrons - names such as Archduchess Isabella Clara Eugenia, Chiara Margarita Cozzolani and Maria Xaveria Perucona.

itinerairebaroque.com

Kissinger Sommer

June 19 - July 19

Held in the Bavarian spa resort of Bad Kissingen with the Deutsche Kammerphilharmonie Bremen as its resident orchestra, this festival is going all in with the Beethoven anniversary, with its central theme '1770-1827 Beethoven Metamorphosis', and 58 Beethoven concerts. Orchestral highlights include the *Missa solemnis* by the Kammerphilharmonie Bremen under Paavo Järvi, and Symphony No 9 from French period-instrument orchestra Le Cercle de l'Harmonie. Violinist Elena Denisova performs a violin version of Piano Concerto No 2. Bad Kissingen SongWorkshop takes the *An die ferne Geliebte* song-cycle as inspiration for six new works, and the Beethoven

Metamorphosis Day will show Beethoven's connection with modernity and folk music. Non-Beethoven breathers come via Artist-in-Residence pianist Jean-Yves Thibaudet, including a jazz-meets-classical late night with the musicians of Deutsches Symphonie-Orchester Berlin.

kissingersommer.de

Kronberg Academy Chamber Music Connects the World

May 1-11

A chance to hear an international complement of the next generation of aspiring musicians performing alongside some of the world's most famous names, with public rehearsals allowing you a glimpse of the creative processes behind the resultant interpretations. This year's 'Seniors' are violinists Gidon Kremer and Christian Tetzlaff, cellist Steven Isserlis and the clarinetist and composer Jörg Widmann, who are rehearsing with around 20 'Juniors' for seven concerts. Composers include Brahms, Dvořák, Mendelssohn, Shostakovich and, of course, Widmann. There's also a fringe programme that includes an exhibition devoted to the artist portraits of Frankfurt-based photographer Barbara Klemm.

kronbergacademy.de

Kronberg Academy Cello Masterclasses and Concerts

September 25 - October 2

If you love the cello and you're interested in young artists then this is for you. Over 150 young cellists from all over the world centre on Kronberg to attend public masterclasses from the likes of Frans Helmerson, Gary Hoffman, Jens Peter Maintz, Wolfgang Emanuel Schmidt und Jérôme Pernoo, culminating in three Cellists of the Future concerts, the first featuring Anastasia Kobekina and Bruno Philippe, the second László Fenyő and István Várdai, and the third the young soloists of Kronberg Academy. Stuttgart Chamber Orchestra performs with the five tutors at both the opening concert, and the final concert features masterclass students selected for sponsorship awards. There's also a parallel fringe programme that includes an instrument-making exhibition.

kronbergacademy.de

Leipzig BachFest

June 11-21

Based in the city Bach called home for the latter part of his career, this festival stands out for its connections with the places Bach lived and worked, and the participation of its historic venues and ensembles such as the St Thomas's Boys' Choir and the Gewandhaus Orchestra. This year's highlights include the

BEETHOVEN 250

Lucerne Summer Festival

August 14 - September 13

For 2020 Beethoven's works form the central core of this major Swiss festival whose Festival Orchestra is directed by Riccardo Chailly and Yannick Nézet-Séguin. Titled Joy, its offerings include all nine symphonies split between the Lucerne Festival Orchestra and visitors including John Eliot Gardiner and his Orchestra Révolutionnaire et Romantique, the Vienna Philharmonic under Gustavo Dudamel, the Royal Concertgebouwworkest under François-Xavier Roth, and the Staatskapelle Dresden under Christian Thielemann. Non-symphonic Beethoven highlights include Sir András Schiff and tenor Jan Petryka with the *An die ferne Geliebte* song-cycle, and Igor Levit continuing his ongoing piano sonatas cycle. Beyond Beethoven, Chailly continues last summer's Rachmaninov project with Piano Concerto No 2 featuring soloist Denis Matsuev. Composer-in-residence, meanwhile, is Rebecca Saunders, whose new Piano Concerto is one of 10 world premieres this year. Mirga Gražinytė-Tyla is Artiste étoile.

lucernefestival.ch



Christian Thielemann conducts Beethoven

Thomaskirche opening concert featuring Bach's Toccata and Fugue in D minor and a Bach cantata from the church musicians, before the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra join them for Beethoven's Mass in C. Elsewhere, Christophe Rousset and Les Talens Lyriques present Bach's Magnificat alongside that of his son Carl Philipp Emanuel. There's also Bach's solo works for violin and cello respectively from Artists-in-Residence Amandine Beyer and Jean-Guihen Queyras.

bachfestleipzig.de

Lofoten Piano Festival

July 6-11

Set amid the spectacular scenery of Norway's Lofoten islands, this festival alternates each year between piano and chamber. This year it's piano, and therefore sees the usual change of Artistic Director. For 2020 it's Norwegian pianist Christian Ihle Hadland, and the highlights begin with its opening concert: Hadland presenting Grieg's Lyric Pieces, followed by Ligeti's String Quartet No 1 with the Barbican Quartet, then all five performers uniting for the first movement of Schumann's Op 44 Piano Quintet. Other visiting pianists this year include Lise de la Salle, Yevgeny Sudbin and Dénes Várjon.

lofotenfestival.com

MA Festival

July 31 - August 9

Based in Bruges, this early music festival has a special focus on new generation artists, and to that end one of its key events is its International Competition Musica Antiqua for young Baroque soloists (this year for melodic instruments), which offers one entrant a recording on the Ricercar

label. Beyond the competition, 2020's festival sits under the theme 'Passion - Relationship Between Mind and Body', and concert highlights include Ensemble Correspondances with Locke's *Psyché*, Vox Luminis with Cavalieri's *Rappresentazione di Anima e di Corpo*, Les Surprises with Lully's *Dies Irae*, and Capella Cracoviensis with Bach's *Phoebus und Pan*.

mafestival.be

Malta International Music Festival

April 25 - May 10

This Valetta-based festival boasts tempting concert venues such as the 19th-century Robert Samut Hall with its unique Maltese architecture. The programme's finer details were yet to be announced as we went to press, but there will be chamber concerts by the Primavera Chamber Orchestra and grand orchestral concerts from the Malta Philharmonic Orchestra

maltafest.eu

Megève Festival

August 14-30

This French alpine festival presents a mix of classical and jazz music, films and literary talks. The programme's finer details weren't available as we went to press, but it had announced visiting artists as violinist Gidon Kremer, pianist-composer Lera Auerbach, and New York's Bang on a Can All-Stars.

savoytruffle.fr/en/

Festival de Musique Menton

August 2020

Established in 1950, this festival is one of Europe's oldest and most prestigious, attracting big names each year to this French Riviera town, with the most spectacular of its venues being

BEETHOVEN 250

Mikkeli Music Festival

July 4-12

This Finnish festival is the scene of some of the most visually stunning symphonic concerts this summer. The 2020 edition opens with the premiere of *Maaria Skysinger*, a new fairytale inspired by the nature of Lapland and set to music by Sibelius and Leevi Madetoja, featuring various digital visual effects, and played to a 25,000-strong audience at Mikkeli's Farmer's Fair. This year's major visitors are Valery Gergiev with the Mariinsky Theatre Orchestra, who perform four concerts featuring Beethoven, Bruckner and Shostakovich. The closing concert is titled Finnish Fantasia and performed by Vivo Symphony Orchestra under Erkki Lasonpal; it presents Beethoven's *Pastoral* Symphony No 6 alongside Sibelius's Symphony No 3 and *Finlandia*, with the Mikaeli Concert Hall digitally transformed to make it feel as if you're sitting in a natural landscape.

mikkelinmusiikkijuhlat.fi/en/


Gergiev conducts his Mariinsky musicians

the torchlit frontage of its Baroque Saint-Michel Archange Basilica.

festival-musique-menton.fr

Molyvos International Music Festival

August 8-12, 16-19

'Odyssey' is the 2020 theme for this festival on the Greek island of Lesbos under the artistic direction of Greek-German pianist sisters Danae and Kiveli Dörken. Rising stars merge with established names, and while most concerts take place in the historic Castle of Molyvos, the earlier set of pre-festival concerts are hosted by different venues around Lesbos, and also on the neighbouring island of Chios at the famous Chios Mastic Museum. Visiting artists include violinist Franziska Hölscher, clarinettist Sebastian Manz, bassoonist Theo Plath and oboist Celine Moinet. There's also a Musical Moments side programme of pop-up daytime concerts.

molyvosfestival.com/en/

Festival Radio France Occitanie Montpellier

July 10-30

The live-programming jewel in Radio France's crown, this festival offers a huge annual programme in picturesque venues in and around the ancient city of Montpellier. Plus, more than 80 per cent of these concerts are free. The 2020 edition draws its inspiration from 'The Shores of the Mediterranean' and the Beethoven 250th anniversary. Highlights include two rare 19th-century operas: Umberto Giordano's *Fedora* starring Sonya Yoncheva and Charles Castronovo, and Massenet's *Bacchus*. There's also a grand audiovisual project centred around the 'Leçons de ténèbres', Vincent Dumestre leading his period ensemble Le Poème Harmonique in seven concerts at

seven different venues over seven days. Other visiting artists and ensembles include Raphaël Pichon with Pygmalion, François-Xavier Roth and Les Siècles, and the Catalonia National Orchestra.

lefestival.eu

Moritzburg Festival

August 2-16

Under the artistic directorship of cellist Jan Vogler, the Moritzburg Festival has established itself as one of the top international chamber music festivals since its inception in 1993. Every August, internationally renowned soloists and outstanding young artists from all over the world meet in Moritzburg to work on new interpretations of chamber music pieces, before presenting them in ensembles that are unique and exclusive to the festival. This year's programming wasn't available as we went to press, so keep an eye on the website for updates.

moritzburgfestival.de

Munich Opera Festival

June 25 - July 31

General Music Director Kirill Petrenko opens this year's festival with a new production by Mateja Kolečnik of Verdi's *Falstaff*, while the free broadcast to the Max-Joseph-Platz is Korngold's *Die tote Stadt*. Before we get there, though, there's also Ivor Bolton conducting a new production from Hans Neuenfels of Rameau's *Castor et Pollux*. As for the festival workshop, offerings here include the musical theatre piece *Das Wundertheater* based on works by Hans Werner Henze, and the world premiere of Philip Venables's *Out of the Box*. There's also ballet from the Bayerische Staatsballett, and song recitals from the likes of Joseph Calleja accompanied by Vincenzo Scalera, and Jonas Kaufmann with Helmut Deutsch.

staatsoper.de/en

Musique Cordiale

August 1-15

Set in medieval hill towns between Nice and Aix-en-Provence and centred around Seillans, this festival runs a variety of choral, orchestral, chamber and jazz concerts. There's also a Festival Choir, and this year both ensemble and choir are directed by Graham Ross, Director of Music at Clare College, Cambridge. Highlights include Brahms's *Eine deutsches Requiem* with vocal soloists Dima Bawab and Frederick Long, who are also among the soloists for an evening of open-air arias in the Fayence amphitheatre.

musique-cordiale.com

Musique et Vin au Clos Vougeot

June 20-28

Based in Beaune and its surrounding wine domains, this Burgundy festival is one of the treasures of France's festival scene, presenting concerts from international artists featuring unusual programmes which are preceded by wine tastings, all of which is coupled with one of the most generous young artist schemes around. The 2020 edition includes a Meursault Church programme from violinist Hugues Borsarello, viola players Gérard Caussé and Dov Scheindlin, cellist Charles Hervet and oboist Johannes Grosso. This year's free opening night Grande Halle de Beaune concert sees New York Metropolitan Opera concertmaster David Chan conduct the Dijon Bourgogne Orchestra with the festival's 2020 Young Talent career grant recipients, violinist Júlia Pusker and soprano Meigui Zhang. Charles Dutoit conducts the closing concert, featuring cellist Gautier Capuçon, at the 12th-century wine château Clos Vougeot.

musiqueetvin-closvougeot.com

The New Generation Festival

August 26-29

Opera, jazz and instrumental concerts from young artists in the ornamental gardens of Florence's Palazzo Corsini al Prato, followed by partying hard to DJ entertainment, meaning this is one aimed especially at younger audiences who wouldn't usually see themselves as opera goers. The main production for 2020 is Rossini's *La Cenerentola*.

newgenerationfestival.org

Festival O/Modernt

June 12-17

This festival (which translates as 'un/modern') under the direction of violinist and conductor Hugo Ticciati is based at Stockholm's Ulriksdal Palace Theatre, and this year it celebrates its ten-year anniversary. Themed 'Schubert and the Sound of Memory', it therefore nods to its first full decade by focusing its programming around Schubert, a composer whose music is imbued with a sense of memory and nostalgia. Visiting artists and ensembles include tenor Ian Bostridge, pianist Kristian Bezuidenhout and the Mariinsky Theatre Ballet.

omodernt.com/festival

Opera Festival Leipzig

June and July 2022

This particular festival may be a couple of years away yet, but it's one that Wagner fans will want to note in their diary. Wagner was born in Leipzig, and Leipzig Opera has over the past few years set itself the goal of having Wagner's entire operatic output in its repertoire by 2022. The project culminates in June and July 2022 with the performance of all the operas at the Opera House on Augustusplatz. With the exception of the *Ring* operas, they will be performed in the sequence in which they were

BEETHOVEN 250

New Ross Piano Festival

September 23-27

Under the artistic direction of pianist Finghin Collins, this festival in the south-eastern Irish port of New Ross presents young artists alongside established names. The 2020 edition has a focus on music for two pianos, including the world premiere of a Sally Beamish work co-commissioned with the London Piano Festival and performed by its founders Charles Owen and Katya Apekisheva. The theme ties into Beethoven anniversary programming too, by way of Saint-Saëns's *Variations on a Theme by Beethoven* and Liszt's two-piano arrangement of Symphony No 9. Further highlights include Keller's eight-hand arrangement of Brahms's *Academic Festival Overture*. Visiting pianists include Philippe Cassard, while other chamber musicians include violinist Nurit Stark.

newrosspianofestival.com


Philippe Cassard visits New Ross in 2020

New Ross Piano Festival

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newrosspianofestival.com

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NFM is a concert venue and the seat of a performing arts organisation. Andrzej Kosendiak is one of the authors of the concept of this cultural institution and currently serves as its director. The NFM aims to promote active participation in cultural life among the inhabitants of Lower Silesia and visitors from Poland and abroad. The venue is a space for meetings of various artistic disciplines, not only music. 2020 is a special year for the NFM – the institution celebrates the 55th edition of Wratislavia Cantans and the 5th anniversary of the NFM's foundation. 2020 also sees the inauguration of a symphonic organ in the NFM Main Hall.

www.wratislaviacantans.pl

Giovanni Antonini, photo: Marco Borggreve

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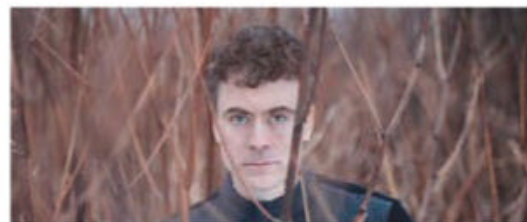
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BEETHOVEN 250**Operadagen Rotterdam****May 21-30**

Ten days of contemporary music theatre and opera productions, as well as a fringe programme take place in May. Topping 2020's offerings is the Dutch premiere of David Lang's *Prisoner of the State*, inspired by the libretto of Beethoven's only opera *Fidelio*; the most ambitious music theatre project ever for both the festival and for De Doelen concert hall, it is performed by Vlaams Radio Koor and the Brochumer Symphoniker, with soprano Claron McFadden in the title role. Among other offerings are a new production of Britten's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* by Opera Zuid. There's also *DEDAPONTETRILOGIE*, young Flemish director Tom Goossens and pianist Wouter Deltour's fresh, humorous take on Mozart and Da Ponte's operatic trilogy, *Don Giovanni*, *Così fan tutte* and *The Marriage of Figaro*.

operadagenrotterdam.nlDavid Lang's *Prisoner of the State* is performed

written. Expect world-class singers and conductors, and an extensive supporting programme.

oper-leipzig.de/en/highlight/wagner-festival-2022/12**Palazzetto Bru Zane Women Composers Festival****March 28 – April 5**

The Palazzetto Bru Zane shines a spotlight on chamber music by forgotten French female composers of the 19th century for this spring festival at its Venice palazzetto base. Composers include Louise Farrenc, Hélène de Montgeroult, Marie Jaëll, Augusta Holmès and Mel Bonis. Performers include cellist Anne Gastinel, Quatuor Zaïde and tenor Cyril Dubois.

bru-zane.com/en**Prague Spring Festival****May 4 – June 4**

Prague's historic festival opens this year with Kirill Petrenko conducting the Berlin Philharmonic in two Mahler works: the *Rückert Lieder* with mezzo Elisabeth Kulman and soprano Christiane Karg, and Symphony No 4. The festival closes with Beethoven's Symphony No 9 from the Czech Philharmonic and Prague Philharmonic Choir conducted by Cornelius Meister, with soprano Miah Persson among the soloists. Beethoven anniversary offerings include the late piano sonatas from András Schiff, and the oratorio *Christ on the Mount of Olives* with Alexander Liebreich conducting the Prague Philharmonic Choir and Prague Radio Symphony Orchestra. Other highlights include the Bach Solo Cello Suites from Alisa Weilerstein. An exciting element of the festival is its competition, which for 2020 is for bassoonists and clarinetists.

festival.cz/en**Festival Printemps des Arts de Monte Carlo****March 13 – April 11**

It may be half way through, but there's still time to nip out to Monaco for this festival, which always has lots of distinctive offerings. Its commitment to new music continues with the world premieres of two festival commissions from Yan Maresz and Gérard Pesson. One of its 2020 themes, meanwhile, is French music from the 18th to the 21st century, concerts to include a Debussy and Ravel piano recital by Nicolas Angelich.

printempsdesarts.mc**Rencontres d'Évian****July 4-11**

This Swiss chamber music festival under the artistic direction of Quatuor Modigliani presents concerts in the pretty 300-seater Théâtre Antoine-Riboud as well as the extraordinary all-wood 1200-seater La Grange au Lac, built in 1993 for former artistic director Mstislav Rostropovich. Beethoven features strongly for 2020, and visiting artists and ensembles include pianists Christian Zacharias and Fazıl Say, Quatuor Ebène, conductor Daniel Harding, and violinists Sergei Khachatryan and Frank Peter Zimmermann.

lagrangeaulac.com/festival/rencontres-musicales-d-evian**Rheingau Musik Festival****June 20 – September 5**

This huge festival is held across the Rheingau and adjoining regions. Beethoven features strongly, including all five piano concertos from Jan Lisiecki and the Chamber Orchestra of Europe, the *Missa solemnis* conducted by Kent Nagano, Symphony No 7 with

Aurora Orchestra, and the Violin Concerto from Anne-Sophie Mutter with the Pittsburgh Symphony under Manfred Honeck. There are also violin sonatas with Frank Peter Zimmermann and Martin Helmchen, and piano trios from Renaud and Gautier Capuçon and Frank Braley. Beyond Beethoven, the major theme for 2020 is 'Freedom', with Artists-in-Residence violinist Lisa Batiashvili playing music from Bach to Arvo Pärt, and pianist-composer and improviser Gabriela Montero who features her own compositions as well as Mozart and Schnittke.

rheingau-musik-festival.de**Riga Jurmala Music Festival****July 10 – August 30**

This Latvian festival, split between Riga and the coastal resort of Jurmala, launched to acclaim last year. It's built around four weekends, each anchored by a leading orchestra. For 2020 it's the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra with Lahav Shani, the Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra with Manfred Honeck, the Saint Petersburg Philharmonic Orchestra with Yuri Temirkanov, and the Philharmonia. Beethoven programming is largely chamber focused, and includes András Schiff with the piano sonatas, Maria João Pires, who also plays Debussy, and violinist Leonidas Kavakos and pianist Enrico Pace pairing the *Kreutzer* Sonata with Brahms and Bartók. Other artists include The King's Singers with their project 'Finding Harmony', and cellist Gautier Capuçon with Dvořák's Cello Concerto.

riga-jurmala.com**Rosendal Chamber Music Festival****August 6-9**

Titled 'LVB250' for 2020, this festival on Norway's west coast under the artistic direction of pianist Leif Ove Andsnes is thoroughly Beethoven-themed this year. Among the artists joining Andsnes are four fellow pianists: Paul Lewis, Jonathan Biss, Víkingur Ólafsson and Kristian Bezuidenhout. Other visiting artists include violinist Alina Ibragimova, soprano Christiane Karg, mandolin player Avi Avital and trumpet player Håken Hardenberger. Contemporary works also feature, including from Norwegian composers Ketil Hvoslef, Rolf Wallin, Lene Grenager and composer-saxophonist Marius Neset.

baroniet.no/en/rosendal-festival**Salzburg Festival****July 18 – August 30**

'Pax – Peace' is the overall theme for the Salzburg Festival's centenary year. Britten's *War Requiem* opens the festival, performed by the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra under the baton of its Music Director Mirga Gražinytė-

Tyla, embodying the festival's founding idea to use art to create a European peace project after the First World War. This year's eight operas begin with a new production of Richard Strauss's *Elektra* directed by Krzysztof Warlikowski, Franz Welser-Möst conducting the resident Vienna Philharmonic, and starring Aušrinė Stundytė and Asmik Grigorian. Other productions include Mozart's *Don Giovanni* directed by Romeo Castellucci and conducted by Teodor Currentzis. As for the concert series, guest orchestras include the Berlin Philharmonic and the West-Eastern Divan Orchestra, while the chamber series features the Belcea and Hagen Quartets.

salzburgfestival.at**Salzburg Whitsun Festival****May 29 – June 1**

Under the artistic direction of mezzo Cecilia Bartoli, this year's festival takes The Colour of Time as its title, focusing on the life and times of 19th-century French composer and singer Pauline Viardot. The major event is Donizetti's *Don Pasquale* in a new production from Moshe Leiser and Patrice Caurier, with Gianluca Capuano conducting Bartoli's own orchestra, Les Musiciens du Prince – Monaco, and Bartoli herself singing Viardot's role, Norina. Another highlight is Faure's Requiem from John Eliot Gardiner with his Orchestre Révolutionnaire et Romantique with the Monteverdi Choir and Soloists.

salzburgerfestspiele.at**Savonlinna Opera Festival****July 3 – August 1**

Operas at this Finnish festival take place in the grounds of the city's medieval Olavinlinna castle, supported by its own festival orchestra, choir and children's choir. This year it presents Szymanowski's *King Roger*, Bizet's *Carmen*, Handel's *Giulio Cesare*, Verdi's *La traviata*, Rossini's *The Barber of Seville* and Massenet's *Werther*. There's also a gala concert from soprano Karita Mattila.

operafestival.fi/en**Schubertiade Hohenems****Markus Sittikus Hall**

April, May, June, July, October
Schubertiade Schwarzenberg
Angelika Kauffmann Hall
June, August

This major Schubert-focused alpine festival presents a multitude of events across two different venues, encompassing song recitals, piano recitals, chamber and orchestral concerts, lectures, exhibitions and masterclasses. The Modigliani Quartet open the Hohenems season with Mozart, Schubert and Bartók, while the Artemis Quartet open the Schwarzenberg season



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15–19 October 2020

Wagner's Ring in London

5–11 February 2021

Welsh National Opera

17–20 March 2021

with Schubert framing Bartók. Other treats include the Dvořák and Tchaikovsky sextets from the Pavel Haas Quartet, joined by their former viola player Pavel Nikl and cellist Danjulo Ishizaka. Other visiting artists are equally starry, and include singers Ian Bostridge, Matthias Goerne and Sophie Rennert, pianists Christian Zacharias, Elisabeth Leonskaja and Igor Levit, cellist Daniel Müller-Schott, and violinists Antje Weithaas and Renaud Capuçon.

schubertiade.at

Septembre Musical – Une fenêtre sur le monde

September 22-30

Formerly Septembre Musical Montreux-Vevey, this Swiss festival as of last year welcomed conductor Mischa Demev as its new Artistic Director and renamed itself 'A Window on the World', referring to the fact that from henceforth it will each year champion a different country's cultural talent – and not just music and dance, but also gastronomy. The inaugural programme in 2019 focused on Russia. Details for 2020 weren't yet available as we went to press, so keep an eye on the website.

septmus.ch

Stresa Festival

July 11-21

Under the artistic directorship of conductor Gianandrea Noseda, a host of concerts are performed on or near Lake Maggiore. This year's theme is 'Beethoven 2.0' with an opening concert featuring Fazıl Say, Seong-Jin Cho and Javier Perianes. There are also appearances by the Philharmonia Zürich, Trio Wanderer and Ian Bostridge, as well as jazz from Uri Caine and Paulo Fresu.

stresafestival.eu

Trasimeno Music Festival

June 27 – July 4

Established by the pianist Angela Hewitt, this Umbrian festival's concerts take place in atmospheric venues such as the Castle of the Sovereign Military Order of Malta in Magione, the Basilica of San Pietro, and the Oratory of San Francesco dei Nobili in Perugia. Highlights this year include Toronto's Opera Atelier dancing to Hewitt's playing of Bach, Rameau, Couperin and Purcell, with soprano Mireille Asselin. The festival's Beethoven's 250th programming has some eye-catching events too, our favourite being the Sacconi Quartet playing Op 131 from memory alongside the Italian premieres of works by Dove, Woolrich and Panufnik. More Beethoven comes via Jane Glover leading Milan's La Verdi Orchestra and Chorus in a programme to include the *Choral Fantasy* and the Mass in C.

trasimenomusicfestival.com

Tsinandali Festival

September 5-20

If you're considering exploring the cultural and gastronomic riches of Georgia, look no further than this festival established last year by the team behind the Verbier Festival. Based at the historic Tsinandali wine estate in the ancient wine-growing Kakheti region with views of the Caucasus Mountains, it follows the Verbier model of festival orchestra – the Pan-Caucasian Youth Orchestra under the direction of Gianandrea Noseda – plus an academy with its own masterclasses and concerts. The Verbier Festival Chamber Orchestra also has four concerts. This year's visiting soloists include pianists Behzod Abduraimov, Leif Ove Andsnes (who also conducts) and Fazıl Say, violinists Vilde Frang and Joshua Bell, viola player Lawrence Power, and conductors Gábor Takács-Nagy and Pablo Heras-Casado.

tsinandalifestival.ge

Verona Arena Opera Festival

June 13 – September 5

The Arena di Verona is the spectacular setting for this Italian opera festival. This year's inaugural production is a double bill of Mascagni's *Cavalleria rusticana* and Leoncavallo's *Pagliacci* in a new production by Gabriele Muccino, with the main protagonists sung for one night only during the run by Roberto Alagna (Turridu) and Aleksandra Kurzak (Nedda). The other productions are Verdi's *Aida*, *Nabucco* and *La traviata*, and Puccini's *Turandot*. There's also a Jonas Kaufmann gala, a 'Stars of Opera' gala, a Domingo Opera Night, Beethoven's Symphony No 9 with the Orchestra and Chorus of Fondazione Arena under the baton of Ezio Bosso, and ballet from Roberto Bolle and Friends.

arena.it

West Cork Chamber Music Festival

June 26 – July 5

The coastal town of Bantry in County Cork plays host to a top line-up of international chamber ensembles, and this year's generously programmed opening concert is looking especially exciting: the Dudok Quartet pairing Haydn's String Quartet Op 20 No 6 with the Irish premieres of Caroline Shaw's *En'tracte* and *Valencia*, followed by the Pacifica Quartet with Deirdre Gribbin's *Marrow Sang* and Shostakovich's String Quartet No 2. Beyond concerts, the programme also features masterclasses and talks. Other visiting artists include BBC New Generation Artist cellist Anastasia Kobekina and violinist Alina Ibragimova.

westcorkmusic.ie/chamber-music-festival

BEETHOVEN 250

Verbier Festival

July 17 – August 2

Beethoven is this year's grand theme, Valery Gergiev opening the festival with the Triple Concerto from the Verbier Festival Orchestra with violinist Leonidas Kavakos, cellist Gautier Capuçon and pianist Yuja Wang.



Verbier's mountain air is a draw for musicians

He also conducts the Ninth Symphony with vocal soloists Camilla Nylund, Magdalena Kožená, Evan LeRoy Johnson and René Pape. Mikhail Pletnev performs Piano Concerto No 3, while Pinchas Zukerman's concerts include the Violin Concerto. Chamber-wise, the unmissable event is Quatuor Ébène performing all 16 string quartets, while other highlights include cello sonatas from Miklós Perényi with András Schiff. There's also the world premiere of Gabriel Prokofiev's new creation for chamber ensemble, electronics and processed field recordings in response to Beethoven's *Pastoral* Symphony. Other visiting artists include pianist Martha Argerich.

verbierfestival.com

Wrocław Cantans

September 6-15

Poland's Lower Silesian festival is themed 'South' for 2020, and opens with the vocal music of the Coptic Church originating from Egypt. Further highlights include Marcel Pérès with Ensemble Organum and Moroccan artists presenting Mozarabic chant. There is also a programme prepared for the festival by composer Giovanni Sollima, alternating works by composers associated with Naples with indigenous music from Africa, and Baroque group Il Giardino Armonico and soloists with Vivaldi's *Juditha triumphans*.

nfm.wroclaw.pl

Zaryadye Hall Beethoven and Tchaikovsky Festival

February 22 – May 31

If you're not yet aware of Russia's newest state-of-the-art concert hall, then this festival, centred on composers Beethoven and Tchaikovsky, is a good introduction. Opened in 2018, the Zaryadye Hall is in Zaryadye Park, adjacent to Moscow's Red Square. Its acoustics are by Yasuhisa Toyota, and its architectural features include a rounded glass roof, which is the world's largest translucent structure without enclosing walls. Festival highlights include a concert titled 'On Nature', Vasily Petrenko conducting the State Symphony Orchestra of Russia in Beethoven's *Pastoral* Symphony No 6, and Tchaikovsky's *The Tempest* and *Rococo* Variations with cello soloist Alexander Ramm. There's also Maxim Emelyanychev who conducts period-instrument orchestra Pratum Integrum in Beethoven's *Eroica* Symphony No 3 paired with Eberl's Symphony in E flat.

zaryadyehall.com/en

Zeist Music Days International Chamber Festival & Masterclasses

August 15-29

Held in the Netherlands town of Zeist, this chamber music festival presents a concert programme alongside masterclasses for young professional ensembles. Visiting ensembles for 2020 include the Belcea, Pavel Haas, Casals, Quiroga and Van Kuijk Quartets, and the Sitkovetsky Piano Trio. Individual visiting artists include guitarist Juan Manuel Cañizares, clarinettist Michael Hesselink, bassoonist Gretha Tuls, horn player Fons Verspaandonk and double bassist Ying Lai Green. Among the masterclass teachers are members of the Cuarteto Quiroga, violinists Oliver Wille (Kuss Quartet) and Alexander Pavlovsky (Jerusalem Quartet) and cellist Kyril Zlotnikov (Jerusalem Quartet). These masterclasses are followed by a Young Talents concert tour.

zeistmusicdays.nl

Zermatt Music Festival and Academy

September 7-20

Based in the Swiss town of Zermatt by the Matterhorn, this festival attracts some of the world's strongest young orchestral and chamber musicians to play in the Academy Orchestra and also in chamber ensembles with their teachers, the Berlin Philharmonic's Scharoun Ensemble. There's more wind and brass chamber music than in the average festival, and the Scharoun Ensemble like to keep things interesting, so it's guaranteed that much of the chamber repertoire you'll hear will be new to you. Soloists and conductors for 2020 include pianist Steven Osborne and oboist Heinz Holliger.

zermattfestival.com

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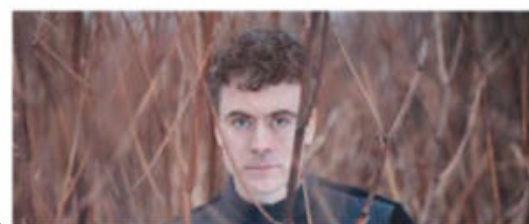
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www.pianosummerschool.com

NORTH AMERICA & BEYOND

BEETHOVEN 250

Aspen Music Festival and School

July 2 – August 23

This major American festival and school under Music Director Robert Spano presents more than 400 events over eight weeks. There are two themes for the 2020 season: 'Beethoven's Revolution', highlights of which are the recreation of a historic 1808 performance of his works, and Spano conducting Beethoven's *Choral* Symphony No 9 as the season finale. The other theme is the centenary of women's voting rights in America, highlights of which include a semi-staged performance of *The Mother of Us All*, Virgil Thomson's rarely heard opera about Susan B. Anthony with libretto by Gertrude Stein. 2020 also marks the inaugural year of the Aspen Opera Theater and VocalARTs program under the artistic co-direction of soprano Renée Fleming and conductor Patrick Summers. Visiting artists include violinist Pinchas Zukerman and pianist Vladimir Feltsman.



Modern opera is a feature at Aspen

aspenmusicfestival.com

Bard SummerScape

June 26 – August 16

Taking place at Bard College in New York's Hudson Valley, with many performances in the Frank Gehry-designed Richard B Fisher Center, this multi-arts festival's major musical offerings occur during the two-week Bard Music Festival. Titled 'Nadia Boulanger and Her World', this year's edition uses 12 themed concerts to examine the French composer who shaped a generation of American music, complemented by pre-concert lectures and panel discussions. Music by her predecessors, contemporaries and successors also features, including her own sister, Lilli. Highlights include the first fully staged American production of *Le Roi Arthur* by Boulanger's compatriot Ernest Chausson, directed by International Opera Award-nominated director Mary Birnbaum, with Leon Botstein conducting the American Symphony Orchestra.

fishercenter.bard.edu/summerscape/

Blossom Music Festival

July 3 – September 6

The Cleveland Orchestra's annual summer festival takes place at its summer home, Ohio's Blossom Music Center, in the beautiful grounds of Cuyahoga Valley National Park. The 53rd season sees the orchestra performing a mix of classical concerts, pops and film concerts, with folk and rock acts alongside. Details for 2020 weren't available as we went to press, so keep an eye on the website.

clevelandorchestra.com

Bravo! Vail

June 25 – August 6

This festival situated in the Colorado Rocky Mountains' Vail Valley

combines major symphonic concerts with a top-tier chamber series. For 2020 it welcomes back resident orchestras the New York Philharmonic, Philadelphia Orchestra and Dallas Symphony Orchestra, plus there's the Vail debut of the Chamber Orchestra of Europe, performing three piano concertos with Yuja Wang. Artistic Director, pianist Anne-Marie McDermott, celebrates her tenth season with concerts including Mozart's Piano Concerto No 25 with the Philadelphia Orchestra under Yannick Nézet-Séguin. This year's commissioned world premieres include works by Caroline Shaw, Mason Bates and Chris Rogerson. Other visiting artists include violinist Nikolaj Szeps-Znaider, conductors Bramwell Tovey and Jaap van Zweden, pianists Behzod Abduraimov and Van Cliburn Competition gold medalist Yekwon Sunwoo, and the Dover Quartet.

bravovail.org

Britt Music and Arts Festival

July 28 – August 16

Three weeks of open-air programming in Oregon's Rogue Valley under Music Director Teddy Abrams, this year's festival opens with a Britt Festival Orchestra concert headlined by a new Britt commission by Pulitzer Prize-winning Caroline Shaw, performed along the Jacksonville Woodlands Trails. There are solo concerto spots from pianist Conrad Tao, mezzo J'Nai Bridges, violinist Tessa Lark and pianist Timo Andres; another highlight is pop music artist Jim James and Teddy Abrams who perform their recently released song cycle, *The Order of Nature*. Actor Bruce Campbell joins the orchestra as narrator for the family show.

brittfest.org

Cabrillo Festival of Contemporary Music

July 26 – August 9

Based in Santa Cruz, California, with conductor Cristian Măcelaru its Music Director, America's longest-running festival of new orchestral music gives voice to new works, presenting a bevy of premieres each year, supported by its Festival Orchestra under the baton of Măcelaru himself. This year's festival welcomes 13 resident composers: Mason Bates, Dan Caputo, Stacy Garrop, John Harbison, Jake Heggie, Pierre Jalbert, Sarah Kirkland Snider, Paola Prestini, Kevin Puts, Andrea Reinkemeyer, Ivan Enrique Rodriguez, Sean Shepherd and Gregory Smith. As for guest artists, there's violinist Benjamin Beilman, mezzo Sasha Cooke, Quartet San Francisco, pianists Lara Downes and Stewart Goodyear, and Gregory Smith narrating.

cabrillomusic.org

Caramoor

June 20 – August 2

This multi-genre festival is based at the historic 90-acre Caramoor estate in Katonah, Westchester. Highlights this year include Nico Muhly's new violin concerto, *Shrink*, receiving its New York premiere from Pekka Kuusisto with The Knights. Female composers and performers continue to be championed too, these include the world premiere of a string quartet by Paola Prestini, and a chamber orchestra work by Anna Clyne. Other visiting classical artists and ensembles include the Orchestra of St Luke's, Trinity Baroque Orchestra, the Danish Quartet, pianists Inon Barnatan and Benjamin Grosvenor, and conductor Ludovic Morlot. The Thalea Quartet meanwhile is this year's Ernst Stiefel String Quartet-in-Residence. Beyond classical, the centenary of the Harlem Renaissance features strongly this year, including the opening-night performance by Wynton Marsalis with his Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra.

caramoor.org

Carmel Bach Festival

July 18 – August 1

This festival is under the artistic direction of Paul Goodwin and takes place in the California beach town of Carmel-by-the-Sea and the surrounding area, with concerts in Carmel's Sunset Center, and the traditional Wednesday night chorale programme in the historic Carmel Mission Basilica. Major works for 2020 include Bach's *Magnificat* and *St John Passion*, Rossini's *Stabat mater*, and James MacMillan's *Seven Last Words at the Cross*.

Other highlights include a concert by soprano Angel Blue, and the return of Fire and Grace (violinist Edwin Huizinga and guitarist William Coulter) for two Spanish programmes. A symphonic night presents Mozart's Symphony No 40 and Mahler's Symphony No 4.

bachfestival.org

Chelsea Music Festival

June 19-27

'Beethoven 250 - Game On' is the upbeat 2020 theme for this Manhattan festival which presents its rich classical programme alongside performing, visual, and culinary arts, plus jazz evenings. Programming this year embraces the contradiction of Beethoven as master gamer and antagonist, by approaching him as a radical optimist who inspires audiences to envision a world united by music. Visiting artists are drawn from organisations including Tokyo's Bunka Kaikan, Indiana University, Beethoven-Haus Bonn and Tanglewood Learning Institute.

chelseamusicfestival.org

Colorado MahlerFest

May 9-17

Total immersion in Mahler is what this festival offers, under the artistic direction of conductor Kenneth Woods and supported by its own Colorado Mahlerfest Orchestra. This year's featured work is Symphony No 2, which acts as anchor to explorations such as the link between Mahler and Wagner, including a performance of the First Act of Wagner's *Die Walküre*. Another topic of exploration is the links between music and the visual arts, approached via Kandinsky, who knew Mahler. There are also chamber and Lieder concerts, open rehearsals and a Mahler symposium with leading Mahler scholars.

mahlerfest.org

Festival d'opéra de Québec

July 28 – August 7

This major Canadian opera festival turns 10 this year. The main production is Mozart's *Così fan tutte* directed by Canadian filmmaker Atom Egoyan. Among other events for 2020 are Donizetti's *Lucia di Lammermoor* with the Jeunesses Musicales Canada, the return of the ever popular 'Brigade-lyrique', an evening of Viennese operetta, and a show aimed at the festival's younger audience members.

festivaloperaquebec.com

Glimmerglass Festival

July 11 – August 25

The Glimmerglass Festival presents four mainstage productions of opera and musical theatre every

summer at its lakeside theatre near Cooperstown in Upstate New York. The 2020 season opens with Rodgers and Hammerstein's *The Sound of Music* in a new co-production with Houston Grand Opera directed by Francesca Zambello, co-directed and choreographed by Eric Sean Fogel and conducted by Music Director Joseph Colaneri. Other mainstage productions are Mozart's *Don Giovanni*, Wagner's *Die Feen* and Handel's *Rinaldo*. There's also a brand new adaptation of Mozart's *Così fan tutte* in the Pavilion, directed by Eric Einhorn and accompanied by a chamber ensemble, plus the world premiere of a youth opera, *The Jungle Book* by Kamala Sankaram and Kelley Rourke.

glimmerglass.org

Grand Teton Music Festival

July 3 – August 22

Based in Jackson Hole, Wyoming, with seven weeks of events including orchestral concerts, chamber music, lectures and community events, GTMF is centered around the Festival Orchestra led by Music Director Donald Runnicles and made up of musicians from America's top orchestras. This year two historic milestones are celebrated: the Beethoven 250th, and the 100th anniversary of Women's Suffrage in the United States, with Wyoming being the first state where women had the right to vote. Festival Orchestra highlights for those themes include a world premiere by Melody Eötvös, and Garrick Ohlsson performing all five Beethoven piano concertos over two concerts. Additional highlights include Midori in Sibelius's Violin Concerto and cellist Johannes Moser in Dvořák's Cello Concerto. Among other visiting artists is soprano Renée Fleming.

gtmf.org

La Jolla Music Society Summerfest

July 31 – August 23

This San Diego festival, under the musical directorship of Inon Barnatan for the second year, has chosen 'Self & Sound' for its 2020 theme, exploring how composers use music to express their individuality and identity, to celebrate and idealise nationality, to convey love and to immortalise friends and family. As well as it being Barnatan's second summer, 2020 is the second year since the opening of the festival's new performance venue, the Conrad Prebys Performing Arts Center. Visiting artists this year include violinists Paul Huang and Liza Ferschtman and Augustin Hadelich, cellists Paul Watkins, Alisa Weilerstein and Clive Greensmith, double bassist Xavier Foley, the Dover Quartet, clarinettist David

Shifrin, pianist Roman Rabinovich and mezzo Kelley O'Connor.

ljms.org/summerfest

Josef Gingold Chamber Music Festival of Miami

July 5-26

This festival is dedicated to the teachings, philosophy and music of the legendary violinist and teacher Josef Gingold. World-class musicians and pedagogues give private and chamber teaching to college-age students (sponsorships are available), then perform with their students at three weekly public concerts.

jgcmfestival.com

June in Buffalo

June 1-7

Hosted by the University of Buffalo's Department of Music with The Robert and Carol Morris Center for 21st Century Music and under the direction of David Felder, June in Buffalo is a festival and conference dedicated to composers. It offers an intensive schedule of seminars, lectures, workshops and open rehearsals, as well as concerts open to the general public and critics. Each invited composer has one piece performed during the festival. This year's Senior Composers are Hilda Paredes, Robert HP Platz, Roger Reynolds and Ricardo Zohn-Muldoon.

music21c.buffalo.edu

Marlboro Music Festival

July 18 – August 16

With pianists Mitsuko Uchida and Jonathan Biss as joint music directors, this chamber festival takes place in beautiful southern Vermont, two hours from Boston, and gives young professionals the opportunity to collaborate with mature artists in a mentoring relationship. After three weeks of rehearsals covering some 250 chamber works, the artists present the results of their collaborations in public concerts.

marlboromusic.org

Midsummer's Music

June 12 – September 7

Based in Door County, Wisconsin, this festival boasts concert venues overlooking Lake Michigan and Green Bay, and draws on the talents of musicians from the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, Chicago's Lyric Opera, Milwaukee Symphony Orchestra, Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra, Indianapolis Symphony Orchestra, Aspen Music Festival, China National Symphony Orchestra, and the Ravinia Festival. The Pro Arte Quartet also performs, plus Ensemble-in-Residence, the Griffon Quartet. The festival is 30 this year, and consequently the programming celebrates some of the favourite repertoire from the past three decades. There is plenty of Beethoven, while the festival's

BEETHOVEN 250

Montreal Chamber Music Festival

June 12-21

Based at Montreal Museum of Fine Arts' Bourgie Hall, the festival turns 25 this year. British *a cappella* group The Swingles sing the opening concert, with repertoire from Bach to Madonna. Beethoven features strongly of course; highlights include an all-Beethoven programme from the Rolston and Ulysses



The Juilliards play Beethoven's Op 18 No 1 quartets, violinist Barnabás Kelemen and pianist Alexander Ullman, featuring the Viola Quintet, and the world premiere of a new transcription for string quartet of Symphony No 7's Scherzo. There's also all five cello and piano sonatas in one concert from Amit Peled with Alon Goldstein, and the Op 18 Quartet No 1 from the Juilliard Quartet. Perhaps most intriguing of all is a newly discovered string quintet transcription of the *Kreutzer* Violin Sonata, performed by the Ulysses Quartet joined by Festival Founder and Artistic Director, cellist Denis Brott. Young artists performing in the festival's free lunchtime series include cellist Cameron Crozman.

festivalmontreal.org

championing of female composers continues with the spotlight falling on Louise Farrenc and Libby Larsen. Composer-in-Residence is Jacob Beranek.

midsummersmusic.com

Mostly Mozart Festival

July 14 – August 8

A summertime tradition in New York, this festival run by Lincoln Center always offers big names and an array of different styles and venues. The full programme for 2020 wasn't available as we went to press, but its inspiration will be Mozart's innovative spirit, to include groundbreaking multidisciplinary productions, commissions and premieres, acclaimed artists of all genres, all complemented by emerging creative voices.

mostlymozart.org

Music Academy of the West

June 15 – August 8

More than 150 concerts, recitals and masterclasses are centred on the picturesque Miraflores campus and throughout scenic Santa Barbara, California. James Darrah returns as Creative Director for Philip Glass's dance-opera spectacle *Les Enfants Terribles*, Ravel's *L'enfant et les sortilèges* and Humperdinck's *Hansel and Gretel*. The transatlantic educational partnership with the London Symphony Orchestra also continues, beginning with the festival debut of LSO Conductor Laureate Michael Tilson Thomas, who conducts the Academy Festival Orchestra in its annual community concert at the Santa Barbara Bowl. This year's Composers-in-Residence are Pulitzer Prize-winner Ellen Reid and MacArthur Fellow Tyshawn

BEETHOVEN 250

Off the Hook Arts SummerFest

June 15 – July 1

Based in Fort Collins, Colorado, and under the artistic direction of Bruce Adolphe, this festival presents for 2020 'The Power of Music:



Beethoven, Transcendence, Healing', taking the Beethoven 250th anniversary from an interdisciplinary angle, presenting not just the music he composed and inspired, but also investigating the man and his suffering via presentations on music therapy, innovation in the arts and sciences, and how Beethoven's medical history impacted his compositions. Classical concert highlights include an opening night programme featuring violinist Kelly Hall-Tompkins and composer-pianist and festival artist Michael Brown, of Schumann and Brahms works paying homage to Beethoven. Other visiting artists include the Miami Quartet, while the Young Artist Spotlight Recital is from recent Juilliard graduate, violinist Alice Ivy-Pemberton alongside pianist Marija Stroke.

offthehookarts.org

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Sorey, while the 2020 Mosher Guest Artists are soprano Julia Bullock, cellist Steven Isserlis and pianist Conrad Tao. Chamber highlights include the resident Takács Quartet giving its first performance with its new viola player Richard O'Neill. musicacademy.org

Music@Menlo Chamber Music Festival & Institute

July 17 – August 8

Under the artistic directorship of David Finckel and Wu Han, this festival is based at Menlo School in Atherton, California, and is comprised of concerts, lectures, discussions, a training institute and free public events. This year's theme is 'Haydn Connections', exploring his works and influence on the musical world. One highlight is the opening concert, entitled 'Concertos and Cantatas', beginning with CPE Bach's Cello Concerto in A with soloist Inbal Segev, and culminating in JS Bach's *Coffee* Cantata, which was a forbear to Haydn's own secular cantatas. Haydn's Violin Concerto No 1 also features, performed by Jennifer Frautschi and accompanied by Finckel and Han. musicatmenlo.org

Ojai Music Festival

June 11-14

A different music director curates this southern Californian festival each year. For 2020 it's Matthias Pintscher, who brings with him his Ensemble intercontemporain (EIC) as resident ensemble in its first Ojai appearance. The programming then explores the sound worlds of Pintscher himself, seven-time Ojai Music Director Pierre Boulez, and composer Olga Neuwrth, anchored by Boulez's *Memoriale* and *Sur incises*. Neuwrth works include the US premiere of her *Eleanor Suite*, while Pintscher works include the West Coast premieres of *Nur* and *Uriel*. There's also the world premiere of Toshio Hosokawa's *The Flood*, co-commissioned by the EIC and Ojai, and the return of the Calder Quartet. ojai festival.org

Music in PyeongChang

July 22 – August 1

Under the artistic direction of pianist Yeol Eum Son, this South Korean festival and academy is based in the mountains of Gangwon Province, home to the Odaesan National Park. Its main concert series takes place at Pyeongchang's Alpensia Concert Hall and Music Tent, with a daily outreach series running in parallel using venues including a Buddhist temple and a renovated mine. While chamber music is its principal focus, it also has a festival orchestra led by Dmitri Kitajenko, consisting of principal members gathered from more than 20 orchestras including the Radio France Philharmonie, New

York Metropolitan Opera, Gürzenich Orchester Köln and the Oslo Philharmonic. This year's visiting artists include violinists Alena Baeva, Alexander Sitkovetsky and Svetlin Roussev, viola player Maxim Rysanov, cellists Leonard Elschenbroich and Doomin Kim, flautist Andrea Lieberknecht, bassoonist Dag Jensen and pianist Vadym Kholodenko. mpyc.kr

Ravinia Festival

June – September

North America's oldest music festival presents 140 events encompassing everything from Broadway to the African Savanna, including the annual summer residency of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra. New for 2020 is the newly created position of Chief Conductor and Curator for Marin Alsop, who will lead five Chicago SO concerts including a celebration of women's voices featuring Cynthia Erivo, and one marking of the centennial of the 19th Amendment giving American women the right to vote. Violinist Itzhak Perlman's 75th birthday is also celebrated, while Christoph Eschenbach marks his own 80th birthday by conducting Beethoven's Symphony No 9. More big-name Beethoven comes by way of the Triple Concerto with its starry team of violinist Joshua Bell, pianist Jeremy Denk and cellist Steven Isserlis. Exact dates are to be announced soon. ravinia.org

Singapore International Piano Festival

June 4-7

Established in 1994 when piano recitals in Singapore were a rare and treasured event, the Singapore International Piano Festival is hosted by Victoria Concert Hall, which, completed in 1862, is one of Singapore's oldest buildings. Each year the festival welcomes some of the world's most acclaimed pianists, and for 2020 the recitalists are Nelson Goerner, Mei Yi Foo, Leon McCawley and Christian Zacharias. While 2020's final details aren't yet available, previous years have seen the evening recital programme complemented with masterclasses and talks with the pianists. sso.org.sg

Spoleto Festival

May 22 – June 7

Charleston, South Carolina, is the host town for this famous multi-arts festival. Musical highlights for 2020 include the world premiere of *Omar*, an opera by Rhiannon Giddens about 19th-century West African scholar Omar Ibn Said, who was captured by slave traders and shipped to Charleston. Then there's Beethoven's Symphony No 9, with Ruth Reinhardt conducting the

BEETHOVEN 250

Santa Fe Chamber Music Festival

July 19 – August 24

Set against the backdrop of the Sangre de Cristo Mountains, the festival presents six weeks of concerts, recitals, masterclasses, youth concerts and open rehearsals. The 2020 offering is looking as rich as ever, with plenty of Beethoven in the mix; for instance the opening concert by the Orion Quartet features Beethoven's *Harp* Quartet along with Brahms's Piano Quartet in C minor with pianist Ran Dank, and a recent work by Detlev Glanert. Most notably there's the complete cycle of Beethoven piano trios performed across three evenings by the newly formed Chien-Kim-Watkins Trio (pianist Gloria Chien, violinist Soovin Kim and cellist Paul Watkins). Also on the bill are the Dover and Escher Quartets who team up for the Mendelssohn and Enescu Octets, while further visiting artists include countertenor Jakub Józef Orliński. santafechambermusic.com



Santa Fe offers up the Mendelssohn Octet

Spoleto Festival USA orchestra, Westminster Choir and Charleston Symphony Orchestra Chorus. The Bank of America Chamber Music series returns, with Beethoven's Septet, Schubert's Quintet and the world premiere of a work by Jessica Meyer to commemorate the St Lawrence Quartet's 25th year performing at the festival. spoleto usa.org

Tippet Rise

July 10 – August 29

Tippet Rise Art Center is based near Montana's Beartooth Mountains. Its main concert venue is the 150-seat Olivier Music Barn, with outdoor performances taking place next to striking sculptural structures. Celebrating its fifth anniversary this year, the level of the visiting artists reflects its increasing status. Pianists making their debuts this year

include Marc-André Hamelin, Richard Goode, Boris Giltburg, Valentina Lisitsa and the Hungarian winner of the 2019 Concours Musical International de Montréal, Zoltán Fejérvári. Other debuts come from 2016 Avery Fisher Career Grant recipient violinist Alexi Kenney, cellist Edward Arron and baritone Tyler Duncan. There's also the worldpremiere of a Tippet Rise co-commission by Bora Yoon, performed by MacArthur Fellow Claire Chase. tippetrise.org

Toronto Summer Music Festival

July 9 – August 1

Beethoven Unleashed is the theme for 2020. The detailed programme wasn't available as we went to press, so keep an eye on the website. torontosummermusic.com

BEETHOVEN 250

Tanglewood

June 19 – August 30

Tanglewood is the summer home of the Boston Symphony Orchestra, as well as the famous Tanglewood Music Center summer academy. The Beethoven anniversary gets an entire weekend that explores not just the composer's creative processes and influence, but also the 19th-century sound. Highlights include BSO Music Director Andris Nelsons conducting the *Consecration of the House* Overture, plus all five piano concertos with 2020 Koussevitzky Artist Paul Lewis. Other highlights include Nelsons leading Act 3 of Wagner's *Tannhäuser*, a weekend-long celebration of violinist Isaac Stern on the 100th anniversary of his birth, Thomas Adès directing the 2020 Festival of Contemporary Music, and chamber performances such as Schumann's Piano Quintet from the Emerson Quartet with Emanuel Ax. Other visiting artists include cellists Yo-Yo Ma and Steven Isserlis, violinists Joshua Bell and Pamela Frank, mezzo Susan Graham, and pianist Daniil Trifonov. bso.org



Andris Nelsons embraces Beethoven with the BSO

GRAMOPHONE

RECORDING OF THE MONTH

Jonathan Freeman-Attwood is bowled over by a mesmerising remake of Bach's St Matthew Passion from Masaaki Suzuki's Bach Collegium Japan



JS Bach

St Matthew Passion, BWV244

Benjamin Bruns *ten* Evangelist **Christian Immler**

bass Christus **Carolyn Sampson, Aki Matsui** *sops*

Damien Guillon, Clint van der Linde *countertens*

Makoto Sakurada, Zachary Wilder *tens* **Toru Kaku**

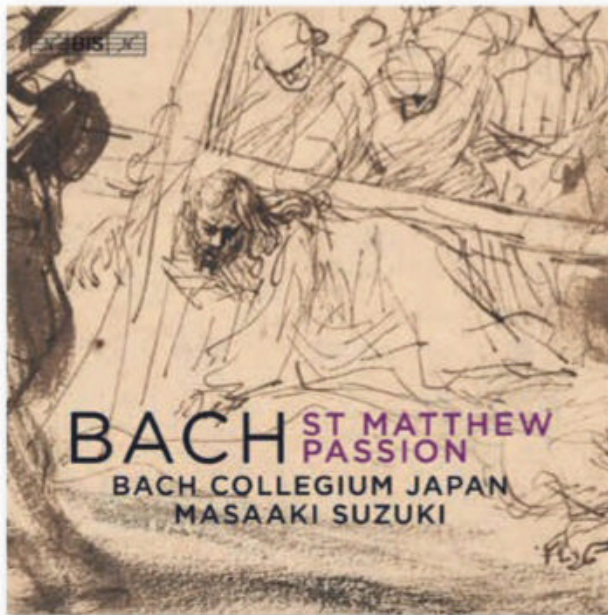
bass **Bach Collegium Japan / Masaaki Suzuki**

BIS (F) ② BIS2500 (163' • DDD/DSD • T/t)

To embark on a second recording of the *St Matthew Passion* 20 or so years after an admired reading with many of the same musicians from Bach Collegium Japan might, one would imagine, have been governed by a specific set of motivations. On the evidence of this powerful, superbly framed and exceptionally judged account, Masaaki Suzuki may instead have reached a point where, over decades of intensely dedicated Bach performance, a revisiting simply became a necessary rite of passage – as it has for many before him.

Those who have traced Suzuki's Bach direction of the last few years, alongside a burgeoning series of enterprising organ volumes, will have noticed a subtle but interesting shift in the realms of emotional risk and dramatic thrust. This is not to say that his performances of Bach's choral works have ever been anything but an exploration of the inner meaning of how music, imagery and text converge in clearly projected ideals. But from the outset here, the music feels embedded in a broader and freer set of expressive ambitions than ever.

Suzuki's vibrantly conceived vision extends to open-shouldered and passionately projected choral contributions, the lived-in storytelling of the burnished Evangelist of Benjamin Bruns (Peter's denial is like a dagger to the heart), the switches between human frailty and febrile physicality of



'The opening growls with the same prescient foreboding and authority of the very best accounts from the past 70 years'

Christian Immler's Jesus and Suzuki's winning attribute of giving the music air and momentum at the same time. As a result, the ritual of each tableau and its reflective suite of arias is given genuinely memorable character. The opening growls

with the same prescient foreboding and authority of the very best accounts of the past 70 years, whether Karl Richter's first or Harnoncourt's final reading.

The lingua franca of this recording is Suzuki's incessantly perceptive blend of directly projected imagery and inward devotion, underpinned by theatrical fervour in the narrative; one never doubts Bach or Suzuki's belief in its importance for mankind. The musicians convey it with infectious zeal in the white-hot conviction of tenor Makoto Sakurada's open-throated Daughter of Zion sequence (from No 19, 'O Schmerz!'); illuminated by light and shade in the instrumental accompaniment, soloist and chorus combine in an essay of unbearably imminent suffering. On the other end of the spectrum, the peroration offers a luminous solace – and what collective beauty Bach Collegium Japan bring to the heart-stopping 'Mein Jesu, gute Nacht' – to the redemption that will follow. No danger here of the final chorus ending in a morose slough of despond.

The quality of soloists in any recording of the *St Matthew* will significantly define its sustainable fortunes. Apart from a couple of underwhelming movements ('Können Tränen' is not vocally settled), the vast majority of arias represent the highest quality of Bach-singing. Damien Guillon is a commanding presence, with a quality of sound that carries both line and text with purpose and panache (listen to the opening of Part 2 as an exceptional example). Aki Matsui, a young and communicative singer, may not quite have the radiance and experience of Carolyn Sampson, but then few in this medium have. The latter's wonderful 'Aus Liebe' reveals both a ravishing suspension of belief and pungent discipleship.



Masaaki Suzuki: decades of dedication to Bach



A Passion of richness and variety: Christian Immler portrays Jesus with deep humanity under the guidance of Masaaki Suzuki, while gamba player Jérôme Hantaï looks on

The high points are numerous: ‘So ist mein Jesus nun gefangen’, as luminously persuasive as you’ll hear (though Fritz Lehmann’s 1949 version takes some beating), Clint van der Linde’s visceral ‘Erbarme dich’ – which grows in stature – and a ‘Mache dich’ from Christian Immler of grounded humanity. Yet there are dimensions of engagement between singers and instrumentalists that instil a sense of spontaneity in the variety and richness of timbre which I hadn’t heard to this extent in Bach Collegium Japan. The bass lines drive the music forwards, the crowd scenes declaim with quicksilver interpolations to the Evangelist’s cries and tempos are allowed to push and pull at key moments. Generic early music politesse is relegated to the shadows.

This reappraisal of the *St Matthew* (the earlier version from 1999 does appear studied and self-conscious in comparison, for all its estimable virtues) takes us on a journey which will continually enthrall, move and surprise. If Bachians have found Suzuki’s performances a touch imperturbable on occasion, this recording throws down the gauntlet on almost every level. A revelatory reading of an eminent Bach interpreter in his prime. With each CD coming in at over 80 minutes, it is squeezed on to two discs, offering excellent value. This certainly has the effect of bringing the two parts of the Passion closer together, to the serious benefit of our ears and imaginations. **G**

Selected comparison:

Suzuki, r1999 (3/00) (BIS) BIS-CD1000/2

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Editor's Choice

Martin Cullingford's pick of the finest recordings reviewed in this issue

Orchestral



Peter Quantrill compares new versions of Mahler's Eighth Symphony:

'If you're prepared simply to enjoy the ride, then all three new performances have their attractions' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 70**



Christian Hoskins enjoys Sibelius from Santtu-Matias Rouvali:

'Rouvali presents a compellingly structured and unmannered view of the symphonic journey' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 74**

Beethoven

Symphony No 5, Op 67

MusicAeterna / Teodor Currentzis

Sony Classical © 19075 88497-2 (31' • DDD)



To make Beethoven's Fifth sound fresh seems a Herculean task, yet that's what

Teodor Currentzis accomplishes here in a relentlessly intense performance that will likely keep you on the edge of your seat from the first note to the last. Such extremity comes at a cost, however.

The first movement is a juggernaut. Even in the momentum-stopping fermatas of the opening bars, Currentzis seems anxious to press forwards, and from there the trajectory remains precipitous. Despite the breathless phrasing and breakneck pace (hitting Beethoven's metronome marking squarely on the nose), his MusicAeterna orchestra play with astonishing rhythmic security and poise, revealing how much care has been lavished on detail. Yet, while the conductor is generally scrupulous in following the composer's markings, he's not shy about being free with the text. Listen to the unwritten diminuendos at 3'08", say, or to the vertiginous swells he adds at 5'38". At times, his attention to detail spills over into fussiness – the laboured phrasing at the opening of the *Andante con moto*, for instance. Andrew Manze, in his recent recording (Pentatone, 3/20), demonstrates how it's possible to highlight the melody's shifting metric emphases while maintaining a *dolce*, singing line.

Currentzis seizes upon the slow movement's contrasts, giving the martial C major music a hard edge – at times it takes on a mechanistic character – that throws the lyrical moments into greater relief, and there's some really lovely, tender playing, particularly near the movement's end. I very much like the prickly off-beat accents and proto-Mahlerian creepiness of the Scherzo's return, but not the oddly joyless, machine-gun-like rat-a-tat of the

Trio section. And while I appreciate the finale's drive, rhythmic snap and lack of bombast, there's a brutality to it that by the end feels quite pugilistic.

Certainly, Currentzis's interpretation is worth hearing, although for all its ferocity, his is a fairly narrow view of the Fifth. Of recent releases, the aforementioned Manze or Blomstedt (Accentus, A/17) provide us with a fuller – and far more humane – vision. **Andrew Farach-Colton**

Beethoven • Knecht

Beethoven Symphony No 6, 'Pastoral', Op 68

Knecht Le portrait musical de la Nature, ou Grande Symphonie

Akademie für Alte Musik Berlin / Bernhard Forck

Harmonia Mundi © HMM90 2425 (66' • DDD)



Justin Heinrich Knecht's five-movement *Portrait musical de la Nature, ou Grande Symphonie* (1783) begins with an evocation of Arcadian bliss (complete with chirping birds and a warbling brook), whips up a torrential storm and concludes with a paean of thanksgiving. Sound familiar? There's actually no definitive evidence that Beethoven knew Knecht's work, although it seems likely he did given how closely it prefigures the *Pastoral* Symphony's scheme. The similarity is entirely superficial, however. Knecht's *Portrait* is hardly a symphony at all, in the formal sense, and more a procession of images and episodes accomplished with little harmonic tension or thematic development.

The music does have its charms, particularly in the outer movements (I find the central storm overlong and disconcertingly cheerful). The theme-and-variations finale is perhaps the most coherent, and even offers a few surprises – note the quotation (or is it a coincidental conjuring?) of the opening chorus from Bach's *Christmas Oratorio* at 1'24". There's not much to choose in terms of character and finesse between this performance by the

Akademie für Alte Musik Berlin (directed from the leader's chair by Bernhard Forck) and the 1997 premiere recording by the Hofkapelle Stuttgart under Frieder Bernius. The latter is part of an all-Knecht programme; this new disc sets Knecht and Beethoven's symphonies side by side.

The Berliners' *Pastoral* starts strongly. I like the sense of quiet, heart-racing joy they convey in the first movement, and their sensitive phrasing in the Scene by the Brook. The ensemble's exceptionally diaphanous sound reveals a lot of fine detail, even if the winds occasionally swamp the strings (of which there are but 21). I certainly want greater weight in the Thunderstorm, but at the same time I find the playing heavy-handed. The finale is similarly prosaic. Worth hearing for the Knecht, certainly, although Bernius gives us a fuller picture of the little-known Rhenish composer. **Andrew Farach-Colton**

Knecht – selected comparison:

Hofkapelle Stuttgart, Bernius (CARU) CARUS83 228

Berlioz

Symphonie fantastique, Op 14. La mort

d'Ophélie, Op 18 No 2^a. Rêverie et caprice, Op 8^b.

Sara la baigneuse, Op 11^a

^bPhilippe Quint ^{vn}^aUniversity of Utah Chamber Choir; Utah Symphony ^aChorus and Orchestra / Thierry Fischer

Hyperion © CDA68324 (81' • DDD)



It's unfortunate timing for Hyperion that its new disc of the *Symphonie fantastique*

follows hot on the heels of Les Siècles' scorching recording for this is a largely enjoyable account by the Utah Symphony conducted by Thierry Fischer. But where Les Siècles enjoy a clean acoustic, the Utah Symphony have the tubby, reverberant sound of Abravanel Hall with which to contend, often muddying the finer details of orchestration.

Fischer is a fine Berliozian. I recall a wonderful *Grande symphonie funèbre et*



Edge-of-your-seat excitement: Teodor Currentzis inspires driven Beethoven from *MusicaAeterna* – but does such drama come at a cost?

trionphale at the Proms, which was so vigorous that bells were shaken off the jingling Johnny! There's plenty of spirit in the finale of the first movement here as the artist's passions overtake him. The Ball is the real highlight, with antiphonal harps (a little spotlight) and the nervous little hesitations in the strings' melody. Fischer draws beautiful playing in the 'Scène aux champs', his woodwinds blending well, although individual voices aren't always clear. Then things turn a bit tame just when one expects the tension to crank up. The 'March to the Scaffold' lacks menace – the bassoons need to be more judgemental, the brass needs to snarl – and our hero's execution isn't that dramatic. Fischer sets a good tempo for the Witches' Sabbath, but the bell is distant, the dance on the artist's grave a little safe. In his excellent booklet note, David Cairns describes the *Fantastique* as 'the child of Beethoven'. I just wish there had been more Beethovenian fire in those final two movements.

The rest of the disc is imaginatively programmed. In the concertante *Rêverie et caprice* for violin and orchestra, Berlioz employs a discarded aria for Teresa from his opera *Benvenuto Cellini*. Philippe Quint's gorgeous, feminine tone is perfect casting, deliciously played and drawing out the *cantabile* lines of this gem. What a

shame that it's hardly ever programmed in concerts these days.

Two choral works complete the disc, well sung by the Utah Symphony Chorus and the University of Utah Chamber Choir. Composed at a time when Berlioz's marriage to the actress Harriet Smithson was in tatters, *La mort d'Ophélie* clearly draws on her *idée fixe* theme from the *Symphonie fantastique*. It's more usually heard as a work for solo singer; here, the choral version is a little bland. *Sara la baigneuse*, a setting of a poem from Victor Hugo's *Les orientales*, comes off rather better. It's a neat move to have Jean-Jacques Henner's 1902 painting *Sarah Bathing* to adorn the disc's cover. **Mark Pullinger**

Symphonie fantastique – selected comparison:
Siècles, Roth (12/19) (HARM) HMM90 2644

Bruckner

Symphony No 1 (Vienna version, 1891)

Philharmonie Festiva / Gerd Schaller

Profil © PH19084 (51' • DDD)

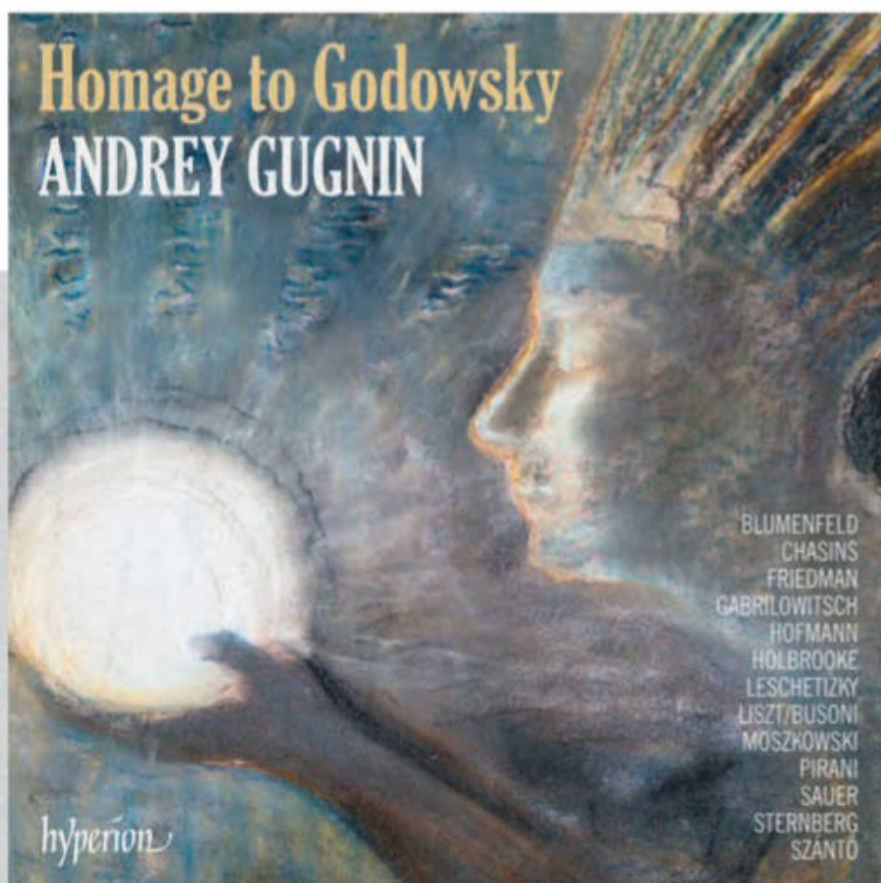
Recorded live at the Regentenbau, Bad Kissingen, Germany, May 26, 2019



Since 1935, when both the Linz and Vienna editions of Bruckner's First Symphony were

published by Robert Haas, conductors and audiences have largely preferred the Linz version, completed in 1866 and amended in 1877, rather than the extensively revised Vienna version of 1890-91. However, in the last few years, recordings of the Vienna version have appeared from Gielen, Abbado, Gimeno, Nézet-Séguin and now Schaller, and there's a strong case for a more sympathetic assessment of this detailed revision from Bruckner's later years.

Schaller's previous recording of the First, using the 1866 score, was a highlight of his original cycle and is one of the finest recordings of the symphony available. I'm not sure this new version is quite as successful. This has nothing to do with the nature of Bruckner's revision (a detailed and lucid explanation of the various symphony versions can be found in Dermot Gault's highly recommendable book *The New Bruckner*; Routledge: 2016) as opposed to the new performance simply lacking some of the energy and commitment of the earlier one. As before, Schaller's interpretation of the first movement is spaciouly conceived and the *Adagio* has some wonderfully ethereal moments, but the overall impression is of a slightly cooler performance. And while the performance of the Scherzo is very fine, the last movement fails to communicate the spirit of this most dynamic of Bruckner finales.



hyperion

An anniversary accolade with a twist: one hundred and fifty years after his birth, this is a wonderful recital of some of the many solo piano works dedicated to Leopold Godowsky. It's difficult to imagine more persuasive performances than these by Andrey Gugnin, making his second appearance on Hyperion.

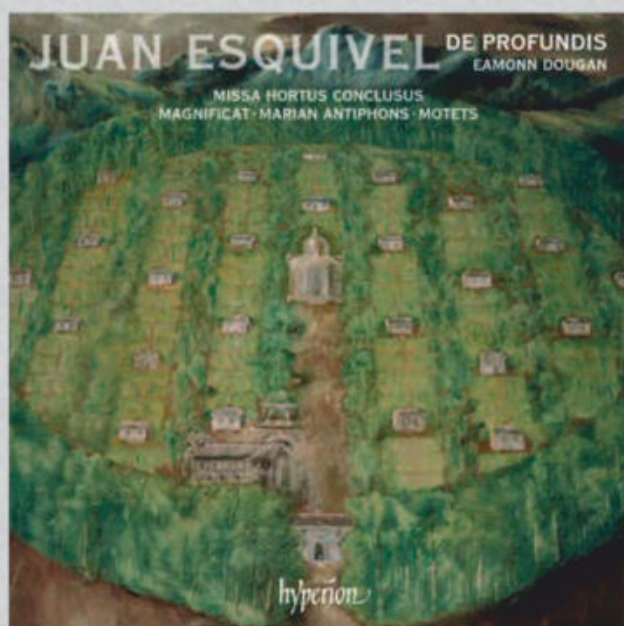
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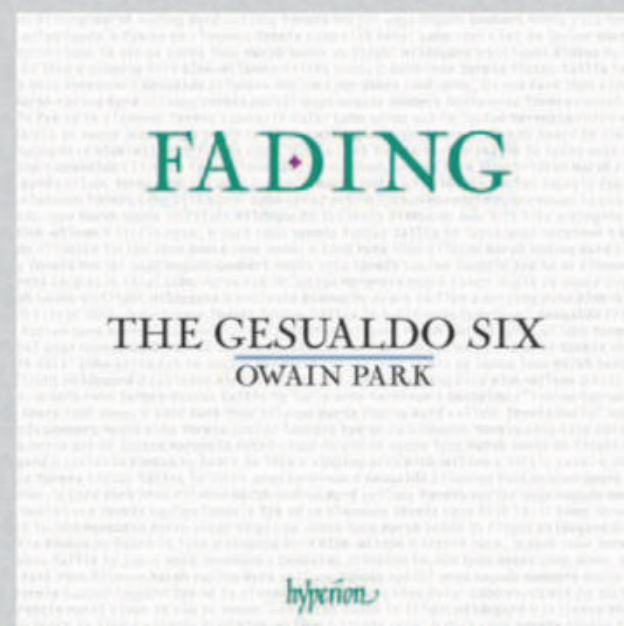
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Beethoven: The Piano Concertos Stephen Hough, Finnish Radio Symphony Orchestra, Hannu Lintu (conductor)
Howells: Missa Sabrinensis & Michael Fanfare The Bach Choir, BBC Concert Orchestra, David Hill (conductor)
Rachmaninov: Songs Julia Sitkovetsky (soprano), Roger Vignoles (piano)
Clara Schumann & Fanny Mendelssohn: Piano Trios & String Quartet The Nash Ensemble
Shostakovich: Violin Concertos Alina Ibragimova, State Academic SO of Russia 'Evgeny Svetlanov', Jurovski
Elgar & Beach: Piano Quintets Takács Quartet, Garrick Ohlsson (piano)
MacMillan: Symphony No 4 & Viola Concerto Lawrence Power, BBC Philharmonic, Martyn Brabbins (conductor)



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I also found the recording slightly less sympathetic than Schaller's Bruckner performances made in the warmer acoustic of Ebrach Abbey. Of the various recordings of the Vienna edition mentioned earlier, Gimeno's is in many ways the most persuasive, and also features a filler in the form of Bruckner's early March in D minor and Three Pieces for orchestra.

Christian Hoskins

Selected comparison:

Luxembourg PO, Gimeno (8/17) (PENT) PCT5186 613

Bruckner

Symphony No 6

Bergen Philharmonic Orchestra /

Thomas Dausgaard

BIS ④ BIS2404 (53' • DDD/DSD)



The word 'chivalrous' invariably comes to mind with the opening measures of Bruckner's

Sixth: knights errant galloping towards new adventures, colourful pennants flying with that first brassy *tutti*. There's also more than a hint of Wagner's *Die Meistersinger* in its inherent good nature. It feels like a more personable Bruckner than the symphony immediately preceding it and those following – and that's a quality that Thomas Dausgaard and the wonderful Bergen Philharmonic Orchestra really illuminate in this lively and heartfelt performance.

Rhythm is not the element one most associates with Bruckner but it's key to the impetus of this reading, which reminds me of performances I've heard from another very accomplished young Brucknerian, Yannick Nézet-Séguin. Slow movement apart, Dausgaard's Bruckner really gets a move on without ever feeling pressed. Transitions (even the weaker ones in the finale) are more spontaneous as a result and the way in which the first and second groups relate and develop in the first movement makes for an exhilarating whole. And that coda where the splendour is all in the harmonic enrichment (Bruckner pulling out all the stops) is sumptuous.

I have always been especially fond of this slow movement, whose themes are special and whose *religioso* nature is less lofty than the great slow movements of the Seventh and Eighth but somehow of a more human scale, intimate even. There's real 'contact' here in the generous and poetic playing of the Bergen Philharmonic, whose qualities become more and more apparent with every hearing – and whose sound resonates splendidly here in Grieg Hall, Bergen.

We're back to the age of chivalry with the super-concise (by Bruckner standards) and bracing Scherzo (a wild boar hunt, perhaps?) and the burnished horns of the Trio sound good here as they take in the surroundings and coax the woodwinds into a casual quote from the Fifth Symphony. Both here and in the finale (the weakest movement, I fear) Dausgaard and his orchestra sound freshly invigorated by the material and make capital of that which can in lesser hands sound portentous and merely academic.

One wonders what Mahler made of the piece (he conducted the first complete performance – with his own amendments – in 1899). The Wagner parallels won't have been lost on him but I can't imagine it being as well played as it is here.

Edward Seckerson

Cherubini

'Discoveries'

Marche: 8 février 1814. Marche: Chimay 22 septembre [1810]. Marche du préfet du département de l'Eure et Loir [1800]. Marche funèbre. Marche pour instruments à vent: Chimay 12 juillet 1809. Marche pour le pompe funèbre du Général Hoche. Marche pour le retour du préfet du département de l'Eure et Loir [1800]. Marche religieuse pour le jour du sacre de Charles X. Marche religieuse pour le pompe funèbre du Général Hoche. Marcia composta per il sig Baron di Braun alla sua terra di Schönau presso Vienna 1805. Overture in G. Symphony in D

La Scala Philharmonic Orchestra /

Riccardo Chailly

Decca ④ 483 1591 (74' • DDD)



Before one gets too excited at the tagline '9 world premiere recordings' on this all-

Cherubini disc from Riccardo Chailly and the Filarmonica della Scala, note that they're all brief marches, mostly perky and inconsequential, composed for political or civil occasions. But then, hey, in the early '70s Herbert von Karajan and the Berlin Philharmonic winds put out a two-disc album of Prussian and Austrian marches ...

The 1805 *March for Baron Peter von Braun* (the dedicatee of Mozart's *Gran Partita*, no less) is suitably *Harmoniemusik* in flavour, while others go off with a jolly swing, peppered with piccolo and percussive splashes. Among the most interesting of the premieres are the march for a lavish commemoration of General Louis Lazare Hoche (1797) and that composed for Charles X's coronation

(1825) which was much admired by Hector Berlioz; one can hear the same sonorities in his own *Grande symphonie funèbre et triomphale*. Chailly adds the sombre (already recorded) *Marche funèbre* (1820) for the Duke of Berry, which is suitably weighty, with lots of atmospheric gong.

Cherubini moved to Paris in July 1786 and became a French citizen in 1794. He was, in the words of fellow composer Étienne Méhul, 'France's leading composer'. Chailly opens with the fine Overture in G, commissioned by the Royal Philharmonic Society in London 1815, which is full of dramatic twists and turns, with hints of Beethoven in its *Sturm und Drang*-style *Allegro spiritoso* section.

Arturo Toscanini, Chailly's predecessor as music director at La Scala, was a great advocate of Luigi Cherubini's music, so it's interesting to compare their approaches to his Symphony in D, which is the major work on this new disc. It's interesting to listen to this work in the context of Beethoven's symphonies: it was composed in 1824 for the RPS at precisely the same time that Beethoven dedicated to it his score of his Ninth. Cherubini's is far more Italianate in style, more operatic, yet it's surprisingly old-fashioned. For example, Cherubini still includes a third-movement minuet, which Beethoven had long since abandoned in his symphonies.

Given Chailly's taut Beethoven cycle with the Leipzig Gewandhaus, I was surprised at how plush and 'comfortable' much of this sounded. There's plenty of energy, but it's stifled within a velvet glove. It's Toscanini and the NBC SO who deliver the greater punch. There's still plenty to admire in the Scala playing, especially in the gentle *Larghetto cantabile* or the sunny finale, with its Haydnesque high spirits. **Mark Pullinger**

Symphony in D – selected comparison:

NBC SO, Toscanini (3/54⁸) (RCA) GD60278

Chopin

Piano Concertos – No 1, Op 11; No 2, Op 21

Warsaw Philharmonic Orchestra / Yundi *pf*

Warner Classics ④ 9029 53201-8 (72' • DDD)



Yundi has been associated with Chopin ever since he became the youngest-ever winner of the eponymous competition in Warsaw in 2000, aged just 18. It's perhaps surprising, then, that he has only previously recorded the First Concerto, back in 2006. On that occasion it was with the Philharmonia under Andrew Davis; this

time he's with the Warsaw Philharmonic, a band that has Chopin running through its veins, which he directs from the keyboard.

There's an unashamedly large-scale quality to the orchestral sound, evident from the opening *tutti*. Yundi is forwardly placed in the recording, so there's never any threat that he'll be overwhelmed by his colleagues. He offers plenty of poetry where needed: when, for instance, he presents the lyrical second theme alone (from 6'41"), but when the horn joins him the effect is overly reticent. And while technically Yundi has a glittering brilliance, at moments such as the final dash to the double-bar (from 18'09") he doesn't have the range of colours or uninhibited glee that Benjamin Grosvenor finds with Elim Chan.

The Romanze is just a touch slower than his earlier account and it seems to me a miscalculation, for it makes the grace notes at the close of the opening phrases overly deliberate, and when Yundi enters he doesn't sustain the line as naturally as previously; this has the knock-on effect of making the faster section (from 5'04") more of a lurch too.

The finale comes off more convincingly, with a swing to its rhythms and grace where required. There's an easier virtuosity in Yundi's earlier version, however, though arguably more depth to his playing this time round. But he pales alongside Grosvenor in terms of characterisation.

The Second Concerto works better, the *tutti* setting up a purposeful sense of energy, to which Yundi responds with a gnarly strength. And the slow movement flows more easily than that of No 1, with seamless trilling from the soloist. It has a good sense of drama, too, at moments such as when piano rhapsodises against tremolo strings (from 4'25"). There is a persistent niggle, though, that Yundi's melodic lines are more coarsely sung than the spun silk of Grosvenor. The weight of the orchestra is used to good effect in the finale, with some fine solo playing from the flute. Yet the passage with *col legno* violins (2'06") is just a little underwhelming as the piano is too dominantly balanced here. And while the switch to the major (6'30") is finely judged, it doesn't have the emotional impact that Grosvenor and Chan find.

Timing is all. If this disc had turned up a month or two earlier, before Grosvenor's superb accounts, it might have been a different matter, but in the end Yundi doesn't really stand out in what is a very crowded arena. **Harriet Smith**

Concertos Nos 1 & 2 – selected comparison:

Grosvenor, RSNO, Chan (3/20) (DECC) 485 0365

Concerto No 1 – selected comparison:

Yundi, Philh Orch, A Davis (3/07) (DG) 477 6402GH

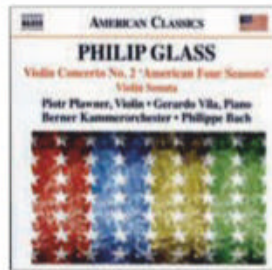
Glass

Violin Concerto No 2, 'American Four Seasons'^a. Violin Sonata^b

Piotr Plawner *vn* ^bGerardo Vila *pf*

^aBerne Chamber Orchestra / Philippe Bach

Naxos American Classics (B) 8 55965 (62' • DDD)



Subtitled *American Four Seasons*, Glass's Violin Concerto No 2 deviates from Vivaldi's

well-known work in that each movement avoids portraying a specific season. Glass's concerto in fact represents the changing conditions and shifting cycles that occur within the seasons rather than inherent differences that exist between them.

Whether the composer was making some general point about seasonal fluctuations as a result of climate change is unclear. What is certain is that there is little let-up for the soloist during the concerto's eight movements, which contain four unaccompanied movements for violin (a prologue followed by three 'songs') alternating with four more-or-less conventional movements featuring soloist, string orchestra and keyboard accompaniment.

Previous recordings by Gidon Kremer and Robert McDuffie (for whom the concerto was written) illustrate just how varied interpretative approaches to Glass's music can be. Kremer's recording inhabits two very different worlds within a single performance – withdrawn and introverted in the soliloquy-like solo movements while taking on a much warmer and engaging persona when the orchestra joins in. McDuffie's approach, on the other hand, is more 'literal'. In general he allows the music to speak for itself, although his performance increases in dramatic intensity.

Piotr Plawner's performance lies somewhere in between the two, so in many respects one gets the best of both worlds. He adds some rubato in the Prologue but does not 'point out' the melody in quite the way that Kremer does. Supported by the Berner Kammerorchester's unobtrusive accompaniment, Plawner's fluidity of line in the first movement echoes McDuffie's. Plawner applies plenty of snap and intensity to the third while impressively combining speed and skill in the fourth. However, in general his rendition is somewhat conservative. What is gained in beauty and clarity of tone is rather lost during those moments that demand a gritter, edgier sound.

Plawner's approach works to his advantage in the Violin Sonata, where

the second movement calls out for an expressive tone and elegant line, and the funky final movement a lighter, more carefree touch. This is a fine performance, as is the concerto, but I'd recommend checking out the Kremer and McDuffie recordings too, for comparison.

Pwyl ap Siôn

Concerto – comparative versions:

McDuffie, LPO, Alsop (12/10) (OMM) OMM0072

Kremer, Kremerata Baltica (8/15) (DG) 479 4817GH

Handel

Concerti grossi, Op 6 – Nos 7-12 HWV325-330

Akademie für Alte Musik Berlin /

Bernhard Forck *vn*

Pentatone (P) PTC5186 738 (80' • DDD/DSD)



Last year the Akademie für Alte Musik Berlin made their debut on

Pentatone (hopping over from Harmonia Mundi) with the first six of Handel's 12-strong collection of Op 6 Concerti grossi (10/19) – Corelli-inspired works published in 1740 that were probably used as between-act entertainment at London performances of Handel's theatre oratorios. Lindsay Kemp reviewed that earlier album, and my own feelings about this concluding half are pretty much in tune with his.

Broad brushstrokes first, and the acoustic of Berlin's Nikodemuskirche is great: a little distance without being distant, allowing us to hear the music's relationship with its surrounding space. Texture-wise, meanwhile, there's weight where you want it, and not where you don't. Note also that while the first disc featured Handel's optional oboe parts, there were no such parts offered for Nos 7 to 12, meaning this disc is for strings and keyboard only.

It's all immensely stylish. Take the nimbly neat, soft suavity with which they serve up No 9 in F major's *Allegro*, the balance giving us delicious lashings of Miguel Rincón Rodríguez's lute, and the harpsichord pleasingly (to my taste) further back than you'll find on Pinnock's zesty reading with The English Concert. I also warmed tremendously to their flowing, swifter-than-average Overture to No 10 in D minor; it's an entirely different brand of drama to the weightier, punchier readings from the likes of Manze and the Academy of Ancient Music, or Pinnock with The English Concert, but for me perhaps even more satisfying.

Returning to No 9, the Menuet's tempo hits its dance roots on the nail while retaining courtly stateliness (whereas you'd

have a job moving smoothly to Pinnock's slower reading), and while the dynamic variation is subtle, it's there. That said, if you also want the major-key shafts of light within the minor to bring a genuine change of colour – to be a genuine burst of joy, in effect – then head to Giovanni Antonini and *Il Giardino Armonico*. Likewise, while the ensuing Gigue comes with gentle, bouncy grace, I personally get more excited by Antonini's string-gripping, twinkle-toed merriness.

Class and polish? Tick. Brimming with spontaneity? Less so. Overall, though, there's much to enjoy here.

Charlotte Gardner

Selected comparisons:

English Concert, Pinnock (3/88^R) (ARCH) 463 094-2AB6

AAM, Manze (A/98) (HARM) ➔ HMU90 7228/9

Giardino Armonico, Antonini

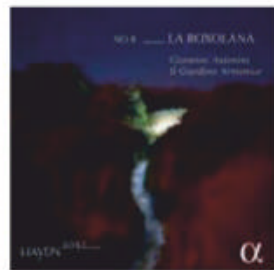
(4/09) (ARCH) 478 0319DX3

Haydn • Bartók

'Haydn 2032, Vol 8 - La Roxolana'

Anonymous Sonata jucunda **Bartók** Romanian Folk Dances, Sz68 **Haydn** Symphonies - No 28; No 43, 'Mercury'; No 63, 'La Roxelane'

Il Giardino Armonico / Giovanni Antonini
Alpha Ⓢ ALPHA682 (77' • DDD)



Which way will they turn next? Giovanni Antonini and his Italian period-

instrument band here present an early, a middle and a late-ish symphony, along with their most surprising contextualising work so far, a set of Romanian folk dances by Bartók, plus a little anonymous sonata.

Working to a performance schedule rather than a rehearse-record one gives this evolving cycle a noticeable edge over so many others. String coordination, as throughout the series, is pinpoint accurate, woodwinds plump-sounding and characterful, and horns gloriously wild. The quicksilver string passages that give the *Mercury* its name glint like light off a sabre, as does the *bariolage* in the Minuet of No 28. The *Roxelane* Symphony (so-called in the Philharmonia score and elsewhere but here rendered *La Roxolana*) is presented in its second version, with additional flute and an alternative finale.

The Bartók doesn't jar in the slightest: the language may be different but the blood that flows through it is audibly of a similar ethnicity: Haydn after all spent much of his life tucked away in a distinctly Slavic corner of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Antonini himself plays not only a Baroque transverse flute but also a

chalumeau – that missing link between the recorder and the clarinet.

The real revelation here, though, is Symphony No 28. It rarely gets an airing outside completist projects such as this – and when it does it often comes over rather flaccidly, almost as if the musicians feel they must apologise for its not being the *London* Symphony. It's easy to look back and see these early symphonies as steps on the path to later greatness but they work best when considered on their own terms. When treated with the virtuosity and seriousness of purpose as here, a work such as No 28 is revealed as every bit as entertaining and finely wrought as those later masterpieces. **David Threasher**

Khachaturian

Violin Concerto. Concerto Rhapsody

Antje Weithaas *vn* **Staatsorchester**

Rheinische Philharmonie / Daniel Raiskin

CPO Ⓢ CPO555 093-2 (63' • DDD)



There seem to be two paths for the soloist in Khachaturian's Violin Concerto (1940): to give in to sheer virtuoso abandon or to act as a kind of storyteller. Perlman (EMI, 7/85), for one, takes the first route, while Antje Weithaas opts for the second, and in doing so weaves a tale that's rife with atmosphere, character and incident. This is not to suggest that Weithaas's playing lacks polish or panache. On the contrary, her tone is gleaming throughout, her intonation spot-on, and she negotiates even the most flamboyant passages with unflustered élan. At the same time, she seems to put everything, including the pyrotechnics, to narrative ends. Note, for example, her sudden, theatrical change in tone when the first movement's lyrical subject appears (starting at 2'11"), or to the pleading portamento she applies when that melody returns near the movement's end (at 14'13").

Like any good storyteller, Weithaas maintains the integrity of the dramatic arc, and does so with a glimmer of impending tragedy in her tone that proves mesmerizing. These qualities make her account of the *Andante sostenuto* unusually compelling, for she seems to sew the entire movement together with a single, unbroken thread. And as with great actors, she communicates most forcefully when at a whisper – listen, say, at 7'40". Some listeners might want more earthiness in the finale but I rather like Weithaas's balletic elegance, as well as the textural detail she and Daniel Raiskin

reveal, like the wholly unexpected Sibelian chill at 5'02".

When it comes to the *Concerto Rhapsody* (1961), virtuosity alone just won't cut it; the music is simply too discursive and lacks the Concerto's melodic clarity. Indeed, there's something distinctly cinematic about this score, and it plays directly to Weithaas's strengths. She leads us from phrase to phrase – and scene to scene – giving the music as much a semblance of inevitability as I think is possible. It's certainly the finest performance on disc since Leonid Kogan's (the work's dedicatee). Raiskin elicits vivid playing from his Koblenz-based orchestra and the recorded sound is superb. Warmly recommended. **Andrew Farach-Colton**

Koechlin • Poulenc

'Couleurs'

Koechlin Sur les flots lointains, Op 130.

Vers la voûte étoilée, Op 129

Poulenc Piano Concerto^a. Sinfonietta

^a**Artur Pizarro** *pf*

Bamberg Symphony Orchestra / Thomas Rösner
Odradek Ⓢ ODRCD364 (65' • DDD)



Thomas Rösner's new recording with the Bamberg Symphony Orchestra presents

two works each by a pair of 20th-century French composers whose posthumous reputations continue to grow. The earliest of these are Charles Koechlin's symphonic poems *Towards the Vault of the Stars* and *On the Distant Waves*. Both date from 1933, though neither was performed or published until decades after the composer's death. Francis Poulenc is represented by two post-war works: *Sinfonietta*, commissioned by the BBC and premiered by the Philharmonia Orchestra in October 1948, and the Piano Concerto, composed for the Boston Symphony and premiered there by Poulenc and Munch in 1950.

Artur Pizarro is the soloist in Poulenc's Piano Concerto, a work that offers little in the sort of conventional virtuoso display that has made both the Organ Concerto and the Concerto for Two Pianos so enduringly popular. Pizarro seems delighted to meet the score on its own terms, turning in a performance of considerable sensitivity and subtlety. Together with Rösner and the Bambergers, he achieves a genuine expressive symbiosis punctuated with disarming earnestness in the opening *Allegretto*. The *Andante*'s ethereal delicacy is at once alluring and the perfect set up for the piquant, bumptious *Rondeau à la française*.

The Sinfonietta, Poulenc's largest purely orchestral work, is the antithesis of the understated concerto. The wind and brass choirs have ample opportunity to strut their stuff and do so with distinction. The whole orchestra acquits itself magnificently in terms of speed, agility and beautifully blended ensemble. Rösner's focus on the phrase is inerrant and the musicians respond with gorgeously contoured shapes that never miss their mark.

The qualities of ensemble that conjure Poulenc's bright palette are equally successful in the more diffuse, shaded sonorities of Koechlin. Despite pleasurable immersion in these foggy textures, with Rösner as guide, we never lose our way. It's a pleasure to hear the orchestra sounding so fine. **Patrick Rucker**

Liszt

A Dante Symphony, S109^a. Künstlerfestzug zur Schillerfeier, S114. Tasso, S96

^aChildren's Choir of the Jena Philharmonic Orchestra; ^aLadies of the Opera Chorus of the Deutsches Nationaltheater, Weimar; Staatskapelle Weimar / Kirill Karabits
Audite © AUDITE97 760 (79' • DDD)



Written in 1857, Liszt's *Künstlerfestzug* was originally planned as a *grand pièce*

d'occasion to accompany the unveiling in Weimar of the famous double statue of Goethe and Schiller that stands in front of the National Theatre, where Liszt (and indeed, more recently, Kirill Karabits) served as Kapellmeister. In the event, the premiere was shelved until the centenary of Schiller's birth two years later, by which time it had become the Prelude to Friedrich Halm's melodrama *Vor hundert Jahren*, for which Liszt provided incidental music to accompany the dialogue between allegorical figures representing Germany and Poetry, narrating the writer's life and celebrating his achievement.

It was not revived, however, until last year's Schiller anniversary, when Karabits performed the complete work, first in Weimar, then with the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra in Poole. The critical response was guarded (regrettably, I didn't hear it), though Karabits has now given us the premiere recording of the *Künstlerfestzug* on its own as the first work on his latest Liszt album. Though we're not dealing with a lost masterpiece, it's by no means negligible. There are echoes of the march from the first movement of the *Faust Symphony* in both the thematic contours and

ceremonial tread of the opening statement, while a lyrical, introspective horn melody, representing Schiller himself, forms an effective point of repose at the centre. Avoiding stodgy solemnity and keeping it light on its feet, Karabits propels it forwards with graceful urgency, and brings terrific energy to the final peroration, where the playing is virtuoso and the Weimar brass, excellent throughout, sound splendidly gleaming and triumphant.

With its companion pieces we are on more familiar ground, though Karabits is perhaps on a less sure footing. Darkly brooding strings, really intense and grieving, get *Tasso* off to a fine start, though the performance turns episodic later on – always a danger with this work – and one misses the greater coherence and drama of Masur and the Leipzig Gewandhaus (EMI, 11/81) here. Apart from a couple of moments of thin violin tone, meanwhile, *A Dante Symphony* is beautifully played and the unusual combination of women's and children's voices in the final *Magnificat* is particularly striking. Karabits gives us a notably baleful account of the opening 'Inferno' with an extremely sensuous Paolo-Francesca love scene, though the 'Purgatorio' again seems discursive when placed beside Nosedà, altogether more intense and purposeful with the BBC Philharmonic (Chandos, 8/09), or the extraordinary emotional and spiritual refinement of Sinopoli with the Dresden Staatskapelle (DG, 11/98), still my first choice for this remarkable score. The *Künstlerfestzug* makes the disc essential listening for Lisztians, but for the other works you perhaps need to look elsewhere.

Tim Ashley

Lutosławski

Symphonies – No 2; No 3

Finnish Radio Symphony Orchestra / Hannu Lintu
Ondine © ODE1332-5 (62' • DDD/DSD)



Hannu Lintu and the Finnish Radio Symphony Orchestra return to the

Lutosławski symphonies (Nos 1 and 4 were reviewed 2/19) with the larger and most unequivocal of this cycle, whose stark contrasts find a parallel in the complementary strengths and failings of these recordings.

It would be wrong to call this account of the Second Symphony (1967) a disappointment but Lintu sells short this imposing work from Lutosławski's most radical phase – breezing across the

succession of episodes and refrains in the opening 'Hésitant' so these become inscrutable rather than provocative, then adopting too sectional an approach in the ensuing 'Direct' such that its cumulative interplay of fixed and aleatoric passages merges into a less than inevitable culmination; after which the desolate coda leaves behind it no tangible emotional resonance.

Whether or not one considers it Lutosławski's masterpiece, the Third Symphony (1983) was a breakthrough both personally and conceptually. Lintu has its measure right from the introductory 'motto' phrase, through the artfully decelerating sequence of études, then into the extended toccata section with its methodical accumulation of energy towards a resplendent climax. Nor does concentration falter in the hymnic section which follows, those sustained threnodies leading to a peroration that brings the whole work full circle with its QED of irresistible conviction.

In the Second, Lintu is preferable to the oddly 'by numbers' approach of Simon Rattle while yielding to the greater focus of Esa-Pekka Salonen or the sustained power of Roman Kofman. Closer to the discursiveness of Salonen than the tautness of the composer in the Third, Lintu's version is equally well played and better recorded than either – making it a likely first choice for this modern classic. Hopefully Ondine's coverage of Lutosławski will not end here.

Richard Whitehouse

Symphonies Nos 2 & 3 – coupled as above:

Los Angeles PO, Salonen (8/86^R, 6/87^R, 6/96^R, 6/13)
(SONY) 88765 44083-2

Symphony No 2 – selected comparisons:

BPO, Rattle (9/15) (DG) 479 4518GH

Deutsche Rad Philh, Kofman (CPO) CPO999 386-2

Symphony No 3 – selected comparison:

BPO, Lutosławski (1/87) (PHIL) 416 387-2PH

Mozart

'Piano Concertos, Vol 5'

Piano Concertos^a – No 5, K175; No 6, K238; No 8, 'Lützow', K246; No 9, 'Jeunehomme', K271. Symphony No 32, K318. La finta giardiniera – Overture. Lucio Silla – Overture. Il re pastore – Overture. Il sogno di Scipione – Overture

^aJean-Efflam Bavouzet *pf*

Manchester Camerata / Gábor Takács-Nagy
Chandos © CHAN20137 (125' • DDD)



In what might from the outside look rather like a sweeping-up exercise, Jean-Efflam



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EXPLORING MAHLER

Peter Quantrill hears three different approaches to Mahler's vast Symphony No 8, the 'Symphony of a Thousand'



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Mahler

Symphony No 8, 'Symphony of a Thousand'

Emily Newton, Michaela Kaune, Ashley Thouret *sops* **Iris Vermillion, Mihoko Fujimura** *contrs* **Brenden Patrick Gunnell** *ten* **Markus Eiche** *bar* **Karl-Heinz Lechner** *bass* **Children's Choir of the Dortmund Choral Academy; Czech Philharmonic Choir, Brno; Slovakian Philharmonic Choir, Bratislava; Dortmund Philharmonic Orchestra / Gabriel Feltz**

Dreier Gaido (F) (2) (S) DGCD21118 (82' • DDD)
Recorded live at the Konzerthaus, Dortmund, July 3 & 4, 2018

Mahler

Symphony No 8, 'Symphony of a Thousand'

Simone Schneider, Jacquelyn Wagner, Regula Mühlemann *sops* **Claudia Mahnke** *mez* **Katharina Magiera** *contr* **Simon O'Neill** *ten* **Michael Nagy** *bar* **Evgeny Nikitin** *bass* **Boys' Choir of Augsburg Cathedral; Orfeón Donostiarra; Munich Philharmonic Choir and Orchestra / Valery Gergiev**

Münchner Philharmoniker (F) 8709997426 (72' • DDD • T)
Recorded live at the Philharmonie, Paris, February 17, 2019

Mahler

Symphony No 8, 'Symphony of a Thousand'

Angela Meade, Erin Wall, Lisette Oropesa *sops* **Elizabeth Bishop, Mihoko Fujimura** *contrs* **Anthony Dean Griffey** *ten* **Markus Werba** *bar* **John Relyea** *bass* **Michael Stairs** *org* **Westminster Symphonic Choir; The Choral Arts Society of Washington; The American Boychoir; The Philadelphia Orchestra / Yannick Nézet-Séguin**

DG (F) 483 7871GH (83' • DDD • T/t)
Recorded live at the Kimmel Center, Verizon Hall, Philadelphia, March 2016



One day in 1909, Mahler arrived at the new offices of his publisher in a terrible flap. He'd jumped

off the tram before it came to a stop and dropped his marked-up proofs of the Eighth, which was promptly sliced in half under the tram-wheels. 'Everything is ruined!' he wailed to Alfred Kalmus, and was only pacified by the providential news that another copy of the proof had been made. Even so, he had to enter all the corrections over again.

Listening at points in these three new recordings, I wonder why he bothered. The nine-word expressive marking over 'Imple superna gratia' could be interpreted several ways – 'same tempo but with a human face' was Adám Fischer's insight when we recently discussed the symphony (AVI-Music, 12/19) – but what it surely doesn't mean is 'sit back and let the soloists take over'. Yet that's exactly the effect of Gabriel Feltz pulling down a couple of gears in Dortmund, flipping the bird to Mahler's insistent imprecations throughout the passage – 'Don't drag', 'Stay strictly in tempo' – and therefore inevitably switching on the afterburners at exactly the point that Mahler instructs 'always in tempo'.

Feltz is not alone. In the lengthy scene-setting to Part 2, Valery Gergiev reads the *Poco adagio* almost twice as fast as the same tempo marking for the slow movement of the Fourth Symphony. For all the fine, Impressionist detail of the Munich Philharmonic's playing, the passage gains a Baroque jauntiness quite at odds with the dramatic context, also with the ultimate derivation of the principal theme from the opening sarabande chorus of the *St Matthew Passion*. Then there's Yannick Nézet-Séguin, who evidently believes that the symphony's apotheosis is not already quite loud enough and long enough. Again, so much for 'don't drag' or 'gradually pressing onwards': this is exactly the Barnum-and-Bailey show that Mahler himself fretted over to Bruno Walter in advance of the Eighth's much-touted premiere.

These are not passing issues, like a dropped note or missed entry, nor are they trivial or isolated examples, but conscious decisions that say, at this particular moment, the interpreter knows better than the composer. And perhaps they do. Mahler famously, if half-jokingly, suggested that his scores would need editing again every five years. As an opera conductor par excellence and inveterate tweeker, of his own music and other people's, he knew that what works is what counts.

But still: Kubelík, Tennstedt and Boulez found their own subtle, musical solutions to these transitions, interludes and climaxes that breathe a spirit of recreative fidelity

demanded by this of all Mahler's symphonies. If, however, you're prepared simply to enjoy the ride, then all three new performances have their attractions. Feltz has a superb team of soloists, well contrasted and all in form, who come into their own in the recitatives and ariosos of Part 2, sensitively recorded and accompanied with telling orchestral detail that entices me to explore the rest of a fairly under-reported cycle. The adult choirs, though, are simply too small (totalling 123 singers for the two groups) and too backwardly mixed – in soft more than loud sections – to carry through the composer's promise of a truly vocal symphony.

Notwithstanding the vaunted acoustic of the Philharmonie de Paris, Gergiev's performance is also more unevenly engineered – the soloists come and go, and Mahler's reliance on the piano in the latter stages of Part 2 comes off badly – and much more rhythmically slipshod, with no safety net of other performances or recorded rehearsals. From a vocal line-up more impressive on paper than in the flesh, Jacquelyn Wagner's Gretchen catches the ear most gratefully. If you can find the concert film on YouTube or MezzoTV, it comes off, just about, with a rough-and-ready sense of occasion.

Recorded four years ago, Nézet-Séguin's performance is also a one-off, to judge from the cougher who ruins the *pianissimo* section of the Chorus mysticus despite the best efforts of the engineers. The soloists are pulled forwards for their solos and then discreetly recessed at climaxes, and time and care has been taken to balance the symphony to the advantage of its contrapuntal and expressionist details. I enjoyed the sensuous charm of 'Jene Rosen', the honeyed portamento of the Philadelphia strings – the performance took place almost a century to the day after Stokowski led the same orchestra in the US premiere – and more generally a tone of reassuring glamour reflected in the grand-operatic cast of soloists.

Were I recommending one of these versions for a newcomer to the piece, it would be Nézet-Séguin's, but none of them answers the Eighth's big questions or lives up to its extraordinary, multifarious character as well as its sometimes absurd ambitions. The symphony deserves better than a continual recourse to late maestros: try David Zinman on CD (Sony/RCA, 7/10) or Riccardo Chailly on film (Accentus, 1/12), both dedicated in their respect for the score, both overwhelming in their impact. **G**

Bavouzet and Gábor Takács-Nagy's Manchester Camerata take a quartet of the earliest piano concertos (Nos 1-4 are arrangements by the very young Mozart of the sonatas of others). This does include, however, the so-called *Jeunehomme* Concerto, No 9, hailed by some (not least among them Alfred Brendel) as Mozart's earliest masterpiece.

It certainly is that, with its greater command of form than its predecessors, and with its plunge to dark C minor for the slow movement – the synthesis of virtuosity and emotional resonance that was to bloom in the miraculous Viennese series of late piano concertos. Forget the silly name (useful only as an identifier): Jeunehomme was in fact one Victoire Jenamy – the way the concerto's title is rendered on the disc documentation – and referred to by the Mozarts either as 'jenomy' or 'Madame genomai' and accordingly misidentified by an earlier generation of scholars.

Interleaved is a series of early opera overtures, displaying the fine control and rich string sonority of the Mancunian players. Don't be fooled when the inlay announces an 'Overture to *Zaide*': it is in fact Symphony No 32, that eight-minute three-movements-in-one work, latterly and speculatively co-opted for Mozart's unfinished and overture-less Viennese operatic project.

Bavouzet is never less than stylish, his fingerwork glittering in the showy fast music, his touch subtle and responsive in the slow movements. With the early and late Viennese concertos still to be tackled, this is developing into a cycle that is never less than extremely likeable, often very affecting and well worth collecting.

David Thresher

Rachmaninov

Piano Concerto No 1, Op 1^a.

Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini, Op 43^a.

Preludes – Op 23 Nos 1 & 2; Op 32 Nos 5 & 12

Anna Fedorova *pf*^a St Gallen Symphony

Orchestra / Modestas Pitrenas

Channel Classics © CCS42620 (69' • DDD)



Were this my introduction to Rachmaninov's First Piano Concerto, I would come away well pleased. It seems to tick all the boxes for a performance of the virtuoso Romantic showpiece that it is: forthright soloist with excellent fingers (sparkling in the *scherzando* passages), precise, full-blooded support from the orchestra, strongly characterised playing

from a pianist who is fully in tune with Rachmaninov's idiom.

What's not to like? Well, quite a few things if you compare Anna Fedorova with benchmark recordings by the composer, Janis, Wild, Hough and Malcolm Binns (on a long-deleted World Record Club LP surely ripe for reissue). A litany of small but questionable musical decisions, a piano whose place in the sound picture keeps the listener at arm's length and a lack of some essential orchestral detail militate against the newcomer's complete success. Whether it be the composer's opening razor-sharp octave salvo (his 1939/40 recordings) or Binns's heroic cadenza in the first movement, Fedorova and Pitrenas come off second best. Fedorova follows the concerto with a selection of four Preludes, beautifully capturing the *echt* Russian melancholy of the F sharp minor Prelude and unbridled ecstasy of the B flat major, both from Op 23.

The *Paganini* Rhapsody struck me as heavy-handed and lacking in playfulness. Of course, it's a serious work; but Rachmaninov inserts myriad flashes of tongue-in-cheek humour (not least those famous last two bars, which go for nothing here) providing a contrast with the more solemn material such as the 'Dies irae' variation. Woodwind details in *tuttis* are often obfuscated. Again, like the Concerto, taken as a whole it's a perfectly fine performance that falls short of the best. Channel Classics divides the work into seven sections for their track-listing instead of the usual practice of programming the work as a single track or allotting one per variation. **Jeremy Nicholas**

Schoenberg

Violin Concerto, Op 36^a. Verklärte Nacht, Op 4^b

Isabelle Faust, ^bAnne Katharina Schreiber *vn*^s

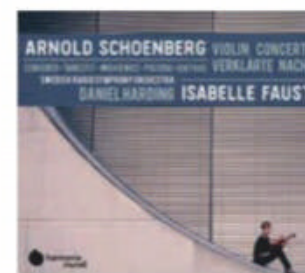
^bAntoine Tamestit, ^bDanusha Waskiewicz *vas*

^bChristian Poltéra, ^bJean-Guihen Queyras *vcs*

^aSwedish Radio Symphony Orchestra /

Daniel Harding

Harmonia Mundi © HMM90 2341 (63' • DDD)



Schoenberg's Violin Concerto can be heard as his typically defiant response to a period of exceptional stress and strain. In 1933, at the age of 58, he was deprived of his professorship in Berlin, and his attempts to establish a new life with his family in America were bedevilled by poor health and offers of unsuitable employment. Only in 1936 did he settle in Los Angeles and it was there, in September, that he finished

the concerto, which he'd begun the previous year. No other composition of his – not even the Fourth String Quartet, written at the same time – has quite as powerful a mix of lyrical vulnerability and energetic assertiveness, though the unfinished opera *Moses und Aron* (begun in 1930 and constantly in his mind thereafter) is evidently a work of the same hand.

That Schoenberg dedicated the Concerto to his pupil Anton Webern could have been a warning as well as a mark of respect – a warning about all that Webern seemed to have renounced in his search for distance between his own compositional style and the great traditions of the classical past which Schoenberg sought to preserve through transformation. That this preservation was a constant struggle will be clear to any violinist tacking this concerto, and there is obviously a better chance in recording than live in concert of avoiding the sense of fingers tending to run ahead of themselves in the ferocious cadenzas that feature in the outer movements. During the past decade or so, recordings by Hilary Hahn and Rolf Schulte have done excellent service in showing that, for all its difficulties, this really is music rather than an arid technical exercise; and for the 2020s Isabelle Faust performs the same function, with admirably alert support from the Swedish RSO under Daniel Harding. Building to its tersely triumphant final cadence, the whole performance is superbly sustained, and as convincing in the reticent eloquence of the central *Andante* as in the turbulent fireworks that dominate elsewhere, in the orchestra as much as in the solo part.

The range of instrumental colours conveyed by Harmonia Mundi's excellent recording of the Concerto cannot be matched in *Verklärte Nacht*, especially in the original string sextet version, shorn of the weighty double basses and opulently enriched textures of Schoenberg's later string-orchestra arrangement. Yet only in the sextet version can the full interactive, individual virtuosity of this music be realised. Isabelle Faust and her colleagues achieve miracles of coordinated flexibility, making the ultimate advance into Schoenberg's serenely shimmering coda a truly magical experience. **Arnold Whittall**

Violin Concerto – selected comparisons:

Schulte, Philb Orch, Craft (6/00^R, 1/09) (NAXO) 8 557528
Hahn, Swedish RSO, Salonen (6/08) (DG) 477 7346GH

Schumann

Symphonies – No 1, 'Spring', Op 38^a; No 3, 'Rhenish', Op 97^b. Overture, 'Manfred', Op 115^a
London Symphony Orchestra /
Sir John Eliot Gardiner

LSO Live (F) LSO0844 (72' • DDD/DSD)

Recorded live at the Barbican, London,
February ^{b7} & ^{a10}, 2019



A mere matter of months after issuing Symphonies Nos 2 and 4 with the LSO, John Eliot Gardiner completes the cycle with the two named symphonies. As noted when reviewing that disc (12/19), Gardiner is a veteran of this music and revisits it here over two decades after recording it with his own period-instrument Orchestre Révolutionnaire et Romantique (Archiv, 6/98).

What remains an overriding characteristic of Gardiner's approach to this music is his feeling for its drama, born not only of his own long experience as a conductor of the operatic as well as the sacred and symphonic repertoire but also from his avowed intent to prove mistaken those doubtful of Schumann's abilities as an orchestrator. His long involvement with period instruments manifests itself in his encouragement of this sleekest of modern Romantic symphony orchestras to let an erstwhile fetish for blend go by the wayside; the heterogeneity of instruments and instrumental groupings is more the order of the day here, allowing higher woodwinds to float free and brighten a phrase, clarinets to blunt and darken the tone or a middle-string motif to ruffle the surface. And Gardiner is never less than fully aware of where this music's motor is situated – the comparison with the poetic Herreweghe against the greater viscerality of these performances continues to hold true.

In between the two symphonies is a suitably louring performance of the Overture Schumann composed for his *Manfred* incidental music in 1848. The sheer individuality of its melodic contours and slithering harmonies makes one wonder yet again why these smaller works are so rarely heard. **David Thresher**

Serebrier

Serebrier Adagio^a. Casi un Tango^b. Flute Concerto with Tango^c. Laments and Hallelujahs^d. Last Tango before Sunrise^a. Symphonic BACH Variations^e. Tango in Blue^f Tchaikovsky None but the lonely heart (arr Serebrier)^a

^cSharon Bezaly fl^bMolly Judson cor ang

^eAlexandre Kantorow pf^dEchos Del Mar Choir;

^cAustralian Chamber Orchestra / Richard Tognetti;

^{bf}Barcelona Symphony Orchestra; ^{ae}RTÉ National Symphony Orchestra / ^{abef}José Serebrier

BIS (F) BIS2423 (77' • DDD/DSD)

Recorded ^{bf}2003, ^c2009, ^{ae}2018

From ^{bf}BIS-CD1175 (4/06), ^cBIS-CD1789



While consistently light-textured in its scoring for string orchestra, each movement of José Serebrier's *Flute Concerto with Tango* (2008) has a distinct colour and atmosphere. The opening *Quasi presto* darts around with nervous energy and an attractive rhythmic snap, while the breezy final *Allegro comodo* is etched with neoclassical clarity. In between, there's a cadenza that evokes the sound world of Debussy's *Syrinx* before wandering off, a *Fantasia* where the soloist converses with solo strings, and a spindly *Tango inconclusivo*. BIS commissioned the Concerto for Sharon Bezaly, whose brilliant performance with the Australian Chamber Orchestra was previously released as part of a mixed programme but makes an even stronger impression in this context.

Like the Flute Concerto's tango riff, both *Tango in Blue* (2001) and *Casi un Tango* (2002) – also previously released – take tango conventions and twist them into new shapes. In *Last Tango before Sunrise* (2018), however, I hear more of Herrmann's score for Hitchcock's *Vertigo* than any audibly apparent vestiges of the Latin dance form. And the *Adagio* (2014) is cut from similar cloth, although it turns out to be a recent orchestral arrangement of a choral work composed when Serebrier was just 15. Indeed, while this programme amply demonstrates the wide range of Serebrier's music, its stylistic continuity is similarly remarkable.

In the *Symphonic BACH Variations*, Serebrier hammers away at permutations of the four-note motif (based on the German 'spelling' of the musical notes BACH), painting a mood that is increasingly dark and ominous – note the appearance of the 'Dies irae' chant in the final movement. Respite comes in sweeping passages of cinematic yearning – try, say, at 1'16" in the first movement – but the tone here is largely grim. The solo part, played with steely tenacity here by Alexandre Kantorow, alternates between the percussive and motoric.

Laments and Hallelujahs (2018) has a much looser grip, beginning in clouds of lonely desolation and becoming more impassioned – again, conjuring cinematically romantic images – before eventually achieving an optimistic, Coplandesque luminosity (complete

audite

“Lucchesini develops amazing presence and tenderness.” (Süddeutsche Zeitung)

ANDREA LUCCHESINI SCHUBERT: LATE PIANO WORKS

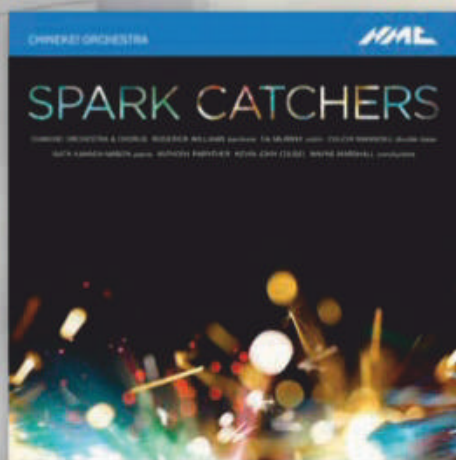


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with choir who sing only in the work's last seconds). It doesn't quite hold together for me, but the programme still serves as a superb introduction to Serebrier's more recent work. The performances, most led by the composer, as well as the recorded sound are uniformly excellent. **Andrew Farach-Colton**

Shostakovich

Symphony No 13, 'Babi Yar', Op 113

Alexey Tikhomirov *bass* **Chicago Symphony Chorus and Orchestra / Riccardo Muti**

CSO Resound © CSOR901 1901 (69' • DDD • T/t)
Recorded live at Symphony Center, Chicago,
September 2018



There are American ensembles with a more sustained Shostakovich

tradition than the Chicago Symphony but the present recording, taken from the opening concerts of the orchestra's 2018-19 season, can stand comparison with any of its distinguished predecessors, however different in tone. There is one Chicago-made Thirteenth from a previous music director, Georg Solti. Belatedly convinced that the composer was something more than a Soviet stooge, he incorporated Anthony Hopkins's reading of the poems in translation from a London studio (Decca, 8/95). By contrast, it was only a fortnight after Eugene Ormandy had given the piece its US premiere that a young Riccardo Muti first presented the unpublished score – in Rome with RAI forces on January 31, 1970. The soloist was Ruggero Raimondi, the text Italian. The story goes that Shostakovich had a soft spot for the results, retaining an off-air cassette tape lately gifted to Muti by Irina, the composer's widow. In her presence and with the late Yevgeny Yevtushenko's original Russian texts restored, the Chicago revival promised great things.

At first you may perceive a lack of urgency. The opening elegy to the un-memorialised victims of 'Babi Yar' is slower even than Haitink's, unfolded with reverence as much as anger. There are theatrical touches and climaxes of bludgeoning power but little of the urgent specificity and attack of Kondrashin's live relay of 1962 (the work's second performance). The strength of Muti's reading lies less in its patient nobility than in the beauty and tenderness he subsequently extracts from writing that can seem sketchy or bald. Approaching his retirement from Chicago he finds unique qualities in the closing movement,

'A Career'. For me there is no more affecting account of its musings on the vagaries of intellectual freedom and dutiful professionalism. The final bars have the poised serenity once associated with Carlo Maria Giulini, albeit not in this repertoire.

En route Muti is plainly moved by the queuing women of Mother Russia, 'In the Store', while 'Fears', ushered in by a mesmerising tuba solo from Gene Pokorny, are not easily shrugged off. With the Soviet state long gone, persecution and tyranny continue to thrive. 'Don't you feel fear?' a stoic Irina Shostakovich is reported to have demanded of her audience at a post-concert talk. 'Don't you agree that fear exists in any society at any time?'

We haven't mentioned the second movement, very much a heavyweight here, 'Humour' doubly elusive in the absence of irony. Compare Vasily Petrenko's radically different conception, where friskiness is all. Still, choir and orchestra are on unambiguously magnificent form in the Windy City. Alexey Tikhomirov, a Bolshoi regular with the right darkness of timbre and numerous Boris Godunovs under his belt, is perfectly cast, offering the artist's responsiveness to poetic detail rather than the documentary truth of a participant. The anxiety and directness of Kondrashin's Vitaly Gromadsky open different doors.

This is one work for which listeners need the poems and the handsome CSO package does include transliterated Russian texts and translations. The two-channel sound, wide-ranging if softer-grained and a tad more intimate than I was expecting, is good at locating unsuspected sonic variety even in the murkiest subterranean depths. Strongly recommended. **David Gutman**

Selected comparisons:

Rintzler, RCO, Haitink (5/86⁸) (DECC) 475 7413DC11

Gromadsky, Moscow PO, Kondrashin (3/94) (RUSS)

RDCC11191 or (9/14) (PRAG) DSD350 089

Vinogradov, RLPO, Petrenko (10/14) (NAXO) 8 573218

Sibelius

Symphony No 2, Op 43.

King Christian II – Suite, Op 27

Gothenburg Symphony Orchestra /

Santtu-Matias Rouvali

Alpha © ALPHA574 (71' • DDD)



Santtu-Matias Rouvali's recording of Sibelius's First Symphony and

En saga (3/19) received a string of accolades following its release last year, including a nomination for best recording in the Orchestral category of the *Gramophone*

Awards. This second release in his Sibelius cycle featuring the Gothenburg Symphony Orchestra is equally impressive. As before, Rouvali's performance is distinguished by an arresting vividness and clarity, allowing the listener to perceive details normally lost in the overall sound picture while presenting a compellingly structured and unmannered view of the symphonic journey. The result is not dissimilar to Osma Vänskä's recording with the Lahti Symphony Orchestra but I find Rouvali's performance has an additional sense of involvement, especially in the two middle movements. In the *Andante*, for instance, the music's precipitous dynamic contrasts and volatile *stringendos* are not only strikingly realised but also powerfully expressive, and the playing in the Scherzo is quite electrifying. The finale is also stirringly played, although like many conductors, including Paavo Järvi (RCA, 3/19) and Andris Nelsons (BSO Classics, 6/15), Rouvali links the chords at the very end of the symphony with a continuous timpani roll rather than presenting them as the imposing stand-alone statements preferred by Vänskä.

Although neglected in the concert hall, Sibelius's splendid *King Christian II* Suite has been well served on record. Berglund's 1970s recording with the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra is still perhaps the finest but Rouvali's performance is very good too. I marginally prefer Berglund's phrasing of the heartfelt melody at the heart of the Serenade but Rouvali's livelier tempo for the Musette brings considerable additional sparkle. In the Ballade, Rouvali is almost a minute slower than his Finnish colleague (5'41" versus 4'46"), but the interpretation of this movement has an epic power that convinces as much as Berglund's more fiery approach. With both works given superlative sound, this is a recording to commend to all Sibelians. **Christian Hoskins**

Symphony No 2 – selected comparison:

Lahti SO, Vänskä (A/97) (BIS) BIS-CD862

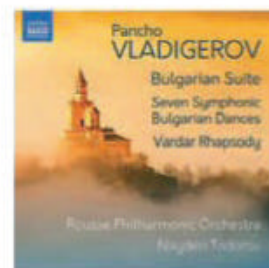
King Christian II Suite – selected comparison:

Bournemouth SO, Berglund (7/82⁸) (WARN) 973600-2

Vladigerov

Bulgarian Suite, Op 21. Seven Symphonic Bulgarian Dances, Op 23. Vardar Rhapsody, Op 16

Rousse Philharmonic Orchestra / Nayden Todorov
Naxos © 8 573422 (74' • DDD)



I do hope that this fine new recording will mean that Pancho Vladigerov's music



Arresting vividness and clarity: Santtu-Matias Rouvali and the Gothenburg Symphony Orchestra continue their impressive Sibelius cycle

becomes better known. There are recordings, but they are not easily available, and even the two discs of his music made by CPO are no longer available. His work was once very well known indeed both in and outside his native country, and in spite of being Bulgaria's most famous national composer, he had a cosmopolitan background, having been born in Switzerland (where his grandfather, a relation of Boris Pasternak, had settled), and studied in Berlin before settling definitively in Sofia in 1932.

Vladigerov's music may be broadly described as 'romantic nationalist'; he makes much use of folk material from his native country, as the titles of both *Seven Symphonic Bulgarian Dances* and *Bulgarian Suite* would suggest, but in combination with a tremendous gift for orchestration: his setting of Bulgarian folk music in a broadly Western European context was effectively the crystallisation of the tradition of art music in a Bulgaria only recently liberated from Ottoman domination (the Third Bulgarian State was proclaimed in 1878).

In many ways, the most impressive work here (as well as the earliest and the best known) is the *Vardar Rhapsody*, originally written in 1922 for violin and piano and entitled *Bālgarska rapsodiya 'Vardar'*, a powerful evocation of the River Vardar,

which runs from Vrutok in what is now North Macedonia to the Aegean Sea. Performances are excellent, and particularly inspired in the variegated colours of the *Bulgarian Suite*. One is inspired to hope Naxos might follow this up with recordings of some of Vladigerov's five piano concertos and two violin concertos.

Ivan Moody

'Music for my Love, Vol 3'

Braid *Out of the Darkness* **Csányi-Wills** *Nocturne for Yodit* **Georgiev** *Lifepath* **Gorb** *Desta* **Head** *Ave atque vale* **Hobson** *Coventry* **Ca(sse)rol(e)** **DH Johnson** *When Words Fail ...* **Matthew-Walker** *The Rivers of Time, Op 151* **Moore** *Leavings: Two Elegies* **Newton** *Beyond* **Compère** **Perna** *Memory Brings You* **Ukrainian Festival Orchestra** / **Paul Mann** *Toccata Classics* © TOCCO504 (70' • DDD)



Vol 3 of Toccata Classics' enormously impressive, moving commemorative

project (honouring Yodit Tekle, pictured on the cover; for the background, see 1/17, 3/19) brings together another 11 works, from composers on either side of the Atlantic, raising the total released to 34. These works once more range from

miniatures – such as David Braid's *Out of the Darkness*, Ian Hobson's reworking of the Coventry Carol or Raymond Head's affecting *Ave atque vale* – to more substantial utterances of 10 minutes' duration or more: Michael Csányi-Wills's gripping *Nocturne for Yodit* or David Hackbridge Johnson's *When Words Fail ...*, arguably the most multifaceted composition here, which moves from a dark G minor to a luminous E major.

The range of mood, too, is remarkably wide, encompassing the elegiac (as in Lloyd Moore's diptych *Leavings* and Dana Perna's *Memory Brings You*), the meditative – Robert Matthew-Walker's beautiful *The Rivers of Time* (based on an unfinished Bach chorale prelude) and Martin Georgiev's *Lifepath* – to the celebratory (Adam Gorb's lively *Desta*, which uses 37 pitches, one for each year of Yodit's life). My favourite piece, however, is Rodney Newton's *Beyond Compère* (2017), a delightful fantasia – on themes by the 15th/16th-century Franco-Flemish composer – that would not be out of place in Respighi's *Ancient Airs and Dances* suites. Paul Mann again produces wonderfully sensitive playing from the excellent Ukrainian Festival Orchestra. The sound, once again, is terrifically clear and warm. I cannot recommend this more highly. **Guy Rickards**

Pergolesi's Stabat mater

Conductor **Christophe Rousset** discusses this extraordinary setting with David Vickers

Pergolesi was, it seems, already terminally ill with tuberculosis when he accepted the *Stabat mater* commission from the Neapolitan confraternity of Cavalieri della Vergine dei Dolori for its annual Lenten services in the church of San Luigi di Palazzo. According to the composer's first biographer, the Marquis of Villarosa, the work was completed on Pergolesi's sickbed at a Franciscan monastery in Pozzuoli shortly before his death (aged only 26) in 1736.

He bequeathed the autograph score to the royal chapel organist Giuseppe de Majo, and it passed through several owners for a few generations before it ended up in the library of Montecassino Abbey. A facsimile of Pergolesi's original manuscript is available, and I wonder if Christophe Rousset has looked at it. He laughs, nonchalantly: 'Yes, I did! But there was nothing valuable in it. We use a good edition by Helmut Hücke [Breitkopf & Härtel, 1987], and I've only ever found two incorrect notes in it.'

It soon becomes obvious that Rousset knows this score inside out. I wonder if his approach to performing it has changed since he recorded it for Decca back in 1999 with Barbara Bonney and Andreas Scholl. 'I would like to say no – but it probably has, yes! I didn't want to consciously change my views because I have to be honest with the piece, and its flow should be a certain way. But it is one of the most performed pieces in Les Talens Lyriques' repertoire. We've done it something like 50 times around the world, with many different singers, and that probably means it has evolved somehow. This music is very theatrical and expressive, so when there is a change of singers – it's Sandrine Piau and Christopher Lowrey in the new recording – the sound and emotional content of the piece will be communicated in totally different ways, even if the core of my conception remains consistent.'

Rousset remains adamant about the importance of full-length appoggiaturas rather than snappy quick passing notes. 'In the



Les Talens Lyriques recording Pergolesi's *Stabat mater* – in summer attire – in the Église Notre-Dame-de-l'Assomption in Auvers-sur-Oise

past when we've done this piece I had arguments with some singers because I insist on long appoggiaturas – not just because it's a matter of personal taste but because it is a rule recommended by Neapolitan *solfeggi* of the time. For such music that expresses pain and beauty, the point of the appoggiatura is the dissonance that expresses the crucial emotions of the words.'

Rousset's perspective as a harpsichordist comes to the fore when he draws my attention to the tread of the walking bass line in the opening *Stabat mater dolorosa*. 'Continuous quavers running in the bass can't all be played exactly equally; it is vital that the curve for all the instrumentalists reaches its peak in the fourth bar of the phrase, which means enriching the length of the quavers where the chromaticism of the second violin comes down. Also, the staccato first violin notes and slurred notes in response all represent the nails being driven into Christ's hands and feet. There is musical refinement, but also pain and grief – reinforced by moments of suspense when there are rhetorical silences after interrupted cadences.'

The third movement, *O quam tristis et afflicta*, is another duet featuring harmonic twists and fermatas producing poignant silences after phrases. Rousset points at how diminished sevenths 'convey the tension of the drama – this represents "affliction"; and then in the next phrase we move from G minor to B flat major as it describes the tenderness of Christ smiling towards his mother – for this transition

I change the tempo just very slightly, and I allow us some ornaments, but when it gets back to the idea of affliction I slow down a little and allow some weight on the dissonance.'

Other movements require vigorous energy. Rousset sees the quick *Quae moerebat et dolebat* as 'full of symbols – the syncopations are a way of describing the nails in Christ's hands on the Cross. If you do just an elegant interpretation, the images behind the music lose their purpose.' After a solemn start, *Quis est homo qui non fleret* transitions into a quick *allegro* at the text 'Pro peccatis suae gentis'. Rousset mentions, 'I do it very fast because of the "flagellis" – the whip strikes here on every beat in the bass.' Another extrovert moment is the animated duet *Fac, ut ardeat cor meum*, and it is the most densely contrapuntal music in the entire piece. Rousset agrees, pointing out that its tension 'is about the fact that "ardeat" is fire. It shows what a good contrapuntist Pergolesi was. When we hear Neapolitan opera of the period, there's a risk we might think its just decorative and *galant*, based on a nice line of singing, but actually all the pupils in Naples conservatoires were trained in counterpoint to a really high level and were able to write a fugue – composers and even *castrati*!'

'In the final movement, the introduction is actually more lyrical and cantabile than anything in the singing lines!'

We look at the exposed instrumentation and the expression of fragility in the sublime finale, *Quando corpus morietur*. Rousset confirms, 'Heartbroken vulnerability is the point. The short notes in the bass and violas are all about the movement of breathing and sighing. Its important that the bass notes on the organ are not too short, just detached and clear enough to give this idea of sobbing in rhythm, and then the second violins play sighing figuration – but the first violins' part is *sostenuto* and very lyrical. The introduction is actually more lyrical and *cantabile* than anything in the singing lines here!'

Dolorous sincerity and contrapuntal skill are set alongside contrasting movements of sunny tunefulness in E flat major that can sound incongruously cheery. In careless hands, these moments might not seem penitent enough for Lent, but Rousset observes that Pergolesi's *stile galant* Neapolitan aesthetic is never merely about prettiness. He points out that the graceful *Sancta mater, istud agas* 'is about the inner soul. You can have the pain of the Virgin, and the agony of Christ on the Cross, and so on, but there's also amazing beauty. If you look at Italian religious art, you can recognise the grace of Mary and also feel tenderness for her.' The parallels between Pergolesi's *Stabat mater* and visual aesthetics lead us to discuss the Italian sculptor Gian Lorenzo Bernini. Rousset suggests, 'Although it's about a century too early, the *Ecstasy of St Teresa* has this southern Italian way of conveying sensuality – that you can enjoy the pain in rapture.' He also shows me an image of the Sicilian rococo sculptor Giacomo Serpotta's stucco depiction of a voluptuous, breastfeeding Charity, in which she is recognisably human rather than pristinely angelic. Rousset explains: 'I'm fond of not having pure angels singing in sacred music. If the song of the Virgin or God is recognisably human, it becomes close enough for us to recognise ourselves, and the more touching the message is.' ⑥

Christophe Rousset's new recording of Pergolesi's Stabat mater with Les Talens Lyriques is released on Alpha on March 13



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Chamber



Mark Pullinger enjoys an album of Poulenc's wind chamber music:

'There's something of the Parisian café about Poulenc's music for woodwinds, full of garrulous chatter' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 81**



David Threasher hears a selection of lesser-known Beethoven:

'There's a hinterland to the great works, and musicians are entitled to dust off the pieces that see the light of day less often' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 84**

Alwyn

String Quartets – No 6; No 7; No 8; No 9.

Seven Irish Tunes

Villiers Quartet

Lyrta Ⓢ SRCD386 (76' • DDD)



This 'most intimate of mediums' was how William Alwyn described the string

quartet and it was an idiom he constantly revisited, from his days as a student at the Royal Academy of Music until 1984, the year before his death. The *Seven Irish Tunes*, all taken from the Petrie Collection edited by Stanford, date from 1923 when the composer was 18. Cloaked in a language of late Romanticism, these delightful miniatures reflect the fashion for folk-song arrangement so prevalent in the early 1920s.

Alwyn began to write quartets in 1920 and by 1936 had composed 13 works. Many of them reflect a need to experiment with form and language in a cerebral medium that largely demanded intellectual application. The Quartet No 6 in E minor (1927), dedicated to his teacher, John Blackwood McEwen (another prolific author of the string quartet), was completed not long after Alwyn became a professor of composition at the RAM. The first and second movements are tinged melodically and harmonically with that affecting, introspective melancholy of Frank Bridge's chamber music before the First World War. A short, bucolic Scherzo then provides a transition to an inventive theme, five variations and an effervescent coda-finale. Dating from 1929, the Quartet No 7 in A has more of an astringent neoclassical edge in its Hindemith-inspired harmony and counterpoint and its four thematically linked movements. Again, there is much of formal interest here, especially the somewhat austere passacaglia second movement and the fugal third movement, marked 'Rondo', but the work as a whole

is end-weighted in the much more substantial 'Retrospect' (almost as long as the previous three movements), a deeply reflective slow movement which barely rises above the dynamic of *pp*.

Both the String Quartets Nos 8 and 9 were completed in 1931. No 8 in D minor is unusual for its seven movements, the first six of which are short and explore a central thematic idea established in the first movement. In what is essentially a set of variations, the quartet culminates in the longer seventh movement, a more dramatic finale which concludes in D major.

Based on lines from Romeo's Death Scene in Act 5 scene 3 of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, the more challenging Quartet No 9 is a concentrated, one-movement form suggestive of a programmatic symphonic poem. An emotional, passionate essay, its opening slow contemplation gives way to more turbulent, agitated outbursts before the work ends in a serene C major. Both quartets are worthy of more detailed study.

These are thoughtful, sympathetic interpretations by the Villiers Quartet of a repertoire by Alwyn which has been rarely if at all explored since the works were first written, and provide a rich insight into the changing nature of the composer's style between 1927 and 1931, when his musical language was engaging with a wide range of different vocabularies and rhetorical ideas – ones, incidentally, he was to use with much fertility in his later film scores in the 1940s and '50s. **Jeremy Dibble**

Brahms • C & R Schumann

'Sonatas and Songs'

Brahms Violin Sonata No 3, Op 108.

FAE Sonata – Scherzo, WoO2. **Wie Melodien zieht es mir**, Op 105 No 1 **C Schumann** *Sie liebten sich beide*, Op 13 No 2 **R Schumann** Violin Sonata No 2, Op 121. FAE Sonata – Intermezzo

Christian Poltéra vc **Kathryn Stott** pf
BIS Ⓢ BIS2167 (65' • DDD/DSD)



When both Schumann and Brahms were so enthusiastic about the instrument, cellists can

rightly mourn that Schumann didn't leave more for it beyond his Cello Concerto than the *Fünf Stücke im Volkston*, and that Brahms didn't supplement his own magnificent pair of cello sonatas and the Double Concerto with a concerto for cello alone. Appropriately enough for these two composers whose lives became so intertwined, the reason behind both of these gaps was relationship issues with others. For Schumann, it was the increasingly difficult relationship as his insanity progressed with his wife Clara, who therefore destroyed his late *Five Romances* for cello before they could be published. For Brahms, it was the hope of mending his falling-out with the violinist Joseph Joachim that played a major role in transforming a solo concerto for the cellist Robert Hausmann into a double one also featuring the violin. So it would be hard for anyone to come up with a more tightly intertwined programme than the one Poltéra has devised: he presents his own cello transcriptions of each of their D minor violin sonatas, separated by their respective contributions to the *FAE Sonata* co-written for Joachim, followed by an unspoken-love-themed song each from Brahms and Clara Schumann.

Beyond the conceptual, the album's musical pleasures begin with the beautiful tone Poltéra brings to it all. Also the elegance in his playing of what can be read as quite choppy dynamic markings; you really hear this in the series of hairpin swells that open Brahms's D minor Sonata, because while they're fully incorporated, his rapid zooms in and out don't come at the expense of continuity of line (which is my slight quibble with Pieter Wispelwey's playing of his own transcription). I'm also thoroughly taken with the greater softness Poltéra's cello has brought to Schumann's



Thoughtful and sympathetic: the Villiers Quartet play string quartets by William Alwyn that reward intellectual application

own sharply pained D minor Sonata, not least the lightly worn legato romance he brings to the first movement's plaintive rising figures at bar 6. No surprise therefore to also discover that the song transcriptions sound under his lyrical fingers as though made for the cello.

The partnering from Stott is exquisitely sensitive and fluid, tempos all feel right, the engineering nicely brings out the surrounding acoustic of Neumarkt's Reitstadel, and although there's some audible breathing it's not enough to affect one's pleasure. Overall, a thoroughly classy job. **Charlotte Gardner**

Dickinson

Air^a. Fantasia^a. Metamorphosis^a. Quintet Melody^a. String Quartets^b – No 1; No 2. Tranquillo^c. The Unicorns – Lullaby^c. Violin Sonata^c

^a**Peter Sheppard Skærved** *vn*

^c**Roderick Chadwick** *pf*^b**Kreutzer Quartet**
Toccata Classics © TOCC0538 (71' • DDD)



Arnold Whittall noted, in his Contemporary Composers feature on Peter Dickinson (10/18), that a recording of the Violin Sonata (1961) was 'in the pipeline'. Here

it is, opening a very nicely – and almost symmetrically – programmed disc of Dickinson's early works, focusing largely on music from his period of study in America (1958-61). All feature the violin, with Peter Sheppard Skærved dominating proceedings, performing to his usual stratospheric standards of musicianship and virtuosity in every track. He throws off the unaccompanied *Fantasia* (1959, its wide leaps evoking the New York skyline) with astonishing skill but is equally compelling in the *Quintet Melody* (1956), *Metamorphosis* (1955, rev 1971) and the beautiful *Air* (1959), these last two originally written for unaccompanied flute. The scintillating melodic angularity of the compact Sonata may be of its time yet remains thoroughly involving; that this is one of the finer English violin sonatas I have no doubt. Roderick Chadwick is the nimble accompanist here and in the delightful, much-arranged Lullaby from Dickinson's cantata *The Unicorns* (1967) and *Tranquillo* (1986, rev 2018), extracted from the slow movement of his Violin Concerto.

Despite their modest dimensions, the two quartets are major offerings. Like the sonata, Quartet No 1 (1958, rev 2010) wears its modernity lightly – although may not have seemed to at the time – a vividly concise three-movement design. Quartet No 2 (1976) is as different as could be for

a work of similar size, a single slow movement haunted by taped fragments of a lost piano rag, which is played whole by quartet and tape (exuberantly out of sync) as a brief codicil. A superb example of Dickinson's compositional and expressive ingenuity, the Second Quartet stands out as a work of range and subtlety in a programme exemplifying those very qualities. Magnificent playing and sound. A marvellous disc. **Guy Rickards**

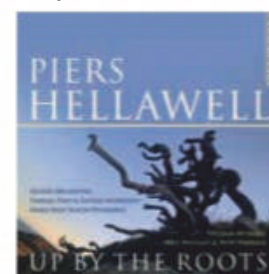
Hellawell

atria^a. Ground Truthing^b. Piani, Latebre^c.

Up by the Roots^d. Wild Flow^e

^a**Sinéad Morrissey** *narr* ^d**William Howard**,

^b**Huw Watkins** *pf*^a**Fidelio Trio**; ^c**Hard Rain Soloist Ensemble**; ^e**Ulster Orchestra / Paul Watkins** *vc*
Delphian © DCD34223 (77' • DDD)



As a title, *Wild Flow* might look like another well-meaning contribution to the

aesthetics of Extinction Rebellion. However, the 20-minute, five-movement orchestral work Piers Hellawell composed for the BBC Proms in 2016 is no mere sermon in sound but a response to an image of surging turbulence that resists control yet proves, in the end, to have been



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shaped by forces which determine both its progress and its duration. Not only is there the overt formality of clean breaks between the separate sections, but as a whole *Wild Flow* moves to a conclusion that neither stops abruptly nor dissolves into silence. Instead, there are indications of a kind of thinking about harmony that acknowledges the long history of cadential closure as something determined not by bass-less flux but from the bottom up; and this is where *Up by the Roots*, the title of the first work on the disc, becomes musically as well as poetically relevant.

Since a literally immobile music is inconceivable, the topics of mobility and migration – so fundamental to human history in the age of modernity – have special resonance when spoken poetry and sounding music combine. *Up by the Roots*, a phrase in the poems by Sinéad Morrissey chosen by Hellawell to alternate with and ultimately to overlap with music for piano trio, signals perspectives on rootedness and mobility with profound and disturbing connotations in Irish history. The expressive contrast between the dramatic musical material and Morrissey's rather matter-of-fact recitation of her poetry might not immediately suggest a productive convergence of media. But the sense of emotions suppressed rather than simply absent in the spoken verse and, as it were, brought to life by the music becomes much clearer as the piece proceeds, and as Hellawell's characteristic working with oppositions between the restless and the becalmed begins to assert itself.

A rhetoric reflecting the tensions between the long shadows of post-Lisztian Romanticism and mid-20th-century expressionism is even stronger in the three instrumental works which come between *Up by the Roots* and *Wild Flow*: the relatively expansive final sections of *atria* and *Ground Truthing* are particularly striking instances of an idiom that gains strength from keeping seductive hints of nostalgia at bay. At the same time, however, the ways in which intricately patterned layers of texture proclaim their essential independence place this music firmly in the present day. Without exception, all the performers relish the technical fluency of Hellawell's scores; the variously sourced recordings are uniformly first-rate and the composer's booklet notes helpfully explain such enigmatic titles as *Piani*, *Latebre* and *Ground Truthing*.

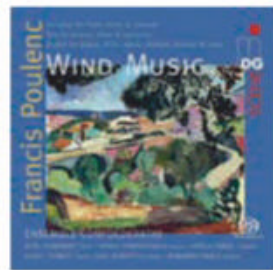
Arnold Whittall

Poulenc

Clarinet Sonata. Flute Sonata. Oboe Sonata. Sextet. Trio for Oboe, Bassoon and Piano

Ensemble Confoederatio

Dabringhaus und Grimm (F) MDG903 2152-6 (69' • DDD/DSD)



There's something of the Parisian café about Poulenc's music for woodwinds. The opening of the Sextet is a prime example, full of garrulous chatter, conversations breaking off unfinished as another idea interrupts. Ensemble Confoederatio, whose players are largely based in Switzerland, present (almost) all the works for winds and piano on a fine new disc from MDG, recorded in the Stadthaus Winterthur.

While starry names have recorded the duo sonatas – Emmanuel Pahud (flute, Warner) and Martin Fröst (clarinet, BIS) being current favourites – discs devoted to Poulenc tend to feature less well-known artists, although pianist Pascal Rogé's for Decca is an exception, featuring prominent French principals.

The Ensemble Confoederatio players evidently have fun in the Sextet. Bassoonist Axel Benoit phrases nicely in the first-movement bridge which heralds the slow section. There isn't quite the sense of Gallic humour summoned up by Rogé and friends, but it's a close call.

Portuguese flautist Rute Fernandes plays her sonata suavely, especially the jocular finale, much preferable to Patrick Gallois's breathy account. Poulenc's mood in the duo sonatas often switches in a heartbeat from ribald humour to bittersweet melancholy. Maria Sournatcheva captures the tragic introspection of the Oboe Sonata well, although I'm very fond of Maurice Bourgue's pungent timbre. Sérgio Pires delivers a rollicking Clarinet Sonata, fuller and rounder in tone than Michel Portal's nasal strains with Rogé, and swifter too.

The Trio for piano, oboe and bassoon is a lot of double-reed fun, the players revelling in comic pauses, especially in the perky finale. It's a shame horn player Lionel Pointet was deprived of Poulenc's *Élégie* for horn and piano ('in memory of Dennis Brain'), as there was room left on the disc, but Decca omits it too.

Like a lot of MDG discs, you really have to pump up the volume, and even then it lacks the brilliant clarity of the Decca recording. But individual performances stand up well and this disc should provide a lot of pleasurable listening. **Mark Pullinger**

Selected comparison – coupled as above:

Rogé, Gallois, Bourgue, Portal, Wallez, Cazalet (8/89^R) (DECCA) 475 7097DC5

Schumann

Piano Trios – No 1, Op 63; No 2, Op 80. Fantasiestücke, Op 88

Kungsbacka Piano Trio

BIS (F) BIS2437 (76' • DDD/DSD)



It seems a while since we've seen the Kungsbacka Trio on disc, most recently with Haydn and Fauré on Naxos a few years ago. Now they move from Austria and France to Germany, and to the Swedish BIS label, for the first volume of Schumann's piano trios.

It's good that they couple the D minor First with the F major Second, rather than the more common pairing of the troubled G minor Third. The Second often feels like the poor relation among the three trios, its open, sunny major tonality at odds with the anguish of its minor-key sisters. And even if this established chamber group is a touch less outgoing than a liaison between soloists – such as, say, the Tetzlaffs and Leif Ove Andsnes – they capture well its joyful essence. So too in the finale of the D minor, where the tension built up in the asymmetrical opening movement and the harmonic gropings of the *Langsam* are resolved in an exultant outpouring of melody. They find the core of the *innigem Ausdruck* demanded of them in the second movement of the Second Trio, as well as the quirkiness at the heart of its gnomic Scherzo.

In between the two trios come the four character pieces of the *Fantasiestücke*, Schumann's first music for this combination, composed at the end of his 'chamber music year' of 1842, although not published until 1850. The Kungsbacka capture well the youthful(ish) ardour of these disparate pieces, whether the coyness of the Humoreske or the songfulness of the Duett.

This is true chamber playing, as opposed to the concert-hall approach of other ensembles such as the one mentioned above. With the appearance ere long of the ghostly Third Trio, this will become a desirable set of this treasurable music, recorded in state-of-the-art BIS surround sound. **David Thresher**

Selected comparison – coupled as above:

C & T Tetzlaff, Andsnes (7/11) (EMI/WARN) 094180-2

Telemann

Recorder Sonatas, TWV41 – a4; B3; C2; C5; c2; d4; F2; f1; f2

Caroline Eidsten Dahl rec

Kate Hearne vc Christian Kjos hpd

LAWO (F) LWC1181 (65' • DDD)



The Norwegian recorder player Caroline Eidsten Dahl has really ticked the

boxes with this collection of nine of Telemann's recorder sonatas, beautifully supported by cellist Kate Hearne and harpsichordist Christian Kjos, most particularly with the opening pair of works: two sonatinas accommodated for the recorder from a 1730 collection for harpsichord and violin or transverse flute which, due to Telemann's own basso continuo parts for them not having been discovered until the 1990s, hasn't been recorded a great deal.

So I'll begin with that pair of sonatinas, and if you're at all familiar with Maurice Steger's recording of them – really the only point of comparison – you'll be struck immediately in the C minor's opening *Largo* by the difference in tempo and overall feel of Dahl's reading; and the funny thing is that, when it's usually Steger who opts for whippet-like tempos, here it's Dahl who wears that mantle. In fact she's half a minute faster than Steger, with a leisurely, flowing sound that presents a genuine alternative to Steger's more stately feel. What's more, zip to the A minor Sonata's concluding *Presto* and she's even pipped him there for speed, coming in at 1'11" in comparison to his 1'46". Aside from tempo comparisons, you'll also hear a very different approach to tone production, Dahl keeping things notably refined overall. You'll hear what I mean in the C minor's *Allegro*, where she pushes far less air out on her emphasised notes.

Smooth tone, elegant articulation and ambitious but effortless-sounding tempos are likewise the names of the game across the remainder of the programme. Take the famous *Vivace* from TWV41:F2 in F. First published in Telemann's own fortnightly 1728-29 periodical aimed at proficient amateur musicians, *Der getreue Music-Meister*, you'd have to be more than merely proficient to take it at the pace she's gone for in this joyous and hugely enjoyable reading. Add the style with which she delivers the intentionally virtuoso *Allegro* of the Sonata in C, TWV41:C2, plucked from the *Essercizii musici*, plus the sweet lyricism of the C minor Sonata's *Dolce*, and this whole album deserves repeated listening.

Charlotte Gardner

Sonatas TWV41:a4 & c2, etc – selected comparison: Steger, Continuo Consort (CLAV) 50-2112

Vasks

Episodi e Canto perpetuo.

Lonely Angel. Plainscapes

Trio Palladio

Ondine © ODE1343-2 (62' • DDD)



This release includes the sixth (at least) recording of Vasks's *Episodi e Canto*

perpetuo but it's still arguably the least familiar piece here. The composer modelled his piano trio's shape on that of Messiaen's *Quartet for the End of Time* but it's impossible not to hear an act of homage in the harmonic (and unison) sounds of the work too – a psychedelic, diabolical, bejewelled journey through life's trials to the reassurance of love featuring a battered old piano. In the movement titled 'Canto perpetuo' the violin sings an ecstatic but strained song (violinist Eva Bindere's tight vibrato is so effective here) before the others join her in an embrace that borders on the suffocating. Transition into the coda is magical, Vasks emerging from Messiaen's influence as himself.

The other works are key pieces in Vasks's output and focused examples of his pain-lined aesthetic – the dual nightmares of oppression and a world gone mad as the dark antithesis to the beauty of nature, the promise of faith and a belief in forgiveness and love. *Lonely Angel* is a straight transcription of the fifth movement of the composer's String Quartet No 4, in which it represents the latter qualities with mirroring string incantations around a steady, shimmering piano with signature Vasks parallel harmonies and harmonic tension pushing the soaring melody on and on. The performance from these Latvian musicians is as soulful as could be imagined.

That Vasks's well-delineated music is ripe for re-voicing is further in evidence from his own trio version of the instrumental/choral work *Plainscapes*, in which he imagined a musical picture of Zemgale in the south of Latvia where 'you can see the starry sky extend right down to the horizon'. Again the three instruments are as characters in this work, which is as much a dramatic three-hander as a broad landscape. And again, the performance – with exquisite gradations of vibrato from the two strings – is invested with rare space, profundity and a sense of deep personal need. Most Vasks discs are worth hearing but this one is a cut above.

Andrew Mellor



'British Cello Works'

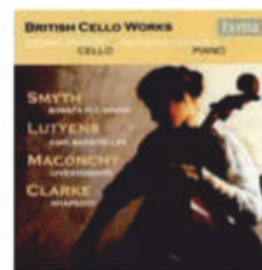
Clarke Rhapsody Lutyens Nine Bagatelles,

Op 10 Maconchy Divertimento Smyth

Cello Sonata

Lionel Handy *vc* Jennifer Hughes *pf*

Lyrta © SRCD383 (73' • DDD)



Ethel Smyth became the doyenne of British women composers but she was young once,

as evidenced by her early Cello Sonata in C minor (1880). An apprentice work, it shows a strong understanding of form in the outer movements; but it is in the Scherzo's sly treatment of Austrian Ländler and in the *Andante* variations that hints of the mature Smyth are to be heard. The later A minor Sonata, Op 5 (not Op 7 as Lyrta's booklet has it), is less unfamiliar but this is the only complete account of the C minor available: the rival on Troubadisc truncates the *Andante* third movement to just the theme, omitting the four variations.

Rebecca Clarke was just eight years Smyth's junior but a generation more forward-looking as a composer. Her *Rhapsody* (1923) is a work of almost equal length – 25 minutes, Clarke's largest composition – but greater heft. A multi-sectional sonata-fantasia of serious expression, this is a work of maturity and mastery that makes one wish Clarke had essayed the symphonic.

The two works by close contemporaries Elizabeth Maconchy and Elisabeth Lutyens may seem slighter but appearances are deceptive. Maconchy's evocation of Latin Americana in the *Serenade* of her *Divertimento* (1941-43) reflects its wartime commission for broadcast to South America and is very different in aesthetic to Smyth's Austrian dance. The other movements may seem unrelated (inspired by a Russian endearment, a clock, a vigil and a masquerade) but thematic interconnections prove otherwise. Similarly, Lutyens's *Bagatelles* (1942) are considerably weightier than their 7'14" duration suggests, not least in their fusion of the Stravinskian and Schoenbergian – over a decade before either Henze or Stravinsky himself attempted it.

The music throughout sounds immaculately prepared, played with considerable skill by Lionel Handy and his splendid accompanist, Jennifer Hughes. Lyrta's sound is warm and beautifully realised. A very fine disc.

Guy Rickards

'Complices'

Brahms Hungarian Dance, WoO1 No 2 **Chopin** Nocturne No 2, Op 9 No 2 **Coltrane/Imbert** Alabama/Improvisation on Bach^a **Dutilleux** Trois Strophes sue le nom de Sacher - No 1, Un poco indeciso **Falla** Siete Canciones populares españolas - No 5, Nana **Fauré** Papillon, Op 77 **Haydn** Divertimento, HobXI:113 - Allegro di molto (arr Piatigorsky). Symphony No 13 - 2nd movt^b **Kreisler** Liebesfreud. Liebesleid **Popper** Elfentanz, Op 39. Mazurka, Op 11 No 3. Serenade, Op 54 No 2 **Poulenc** Léocadia - Les chemins de l'amour **Saint-Saëns** Le carnaval des animaux - Le cygne **Shchedrin** Imitating Albéniz (arr Despalj) **Tchaikovsky** Valse sentimentale, Op 51 No 6 **Vecsey** Valse triste **Zimmermann** Kurze Studie No 4
Jean-Guihen Queyras vc **Alexandre Tharaud** pf
 with ^a**Raphaël Imbert** ten sax
^b**La Diane Française / Stéphanie-Marie Degand**
 Harmonia Mundi © HMM90 2274 (64' • DDD)



You could be forgiven for looking at the title of this latest collaboration between

French masters of their art, Jean-Guihen Queyras and Alexandre Tharaud, and assuming that 'complices' refers to their own chamber complicity as longtime

regular duo partners. However, much as that relationship does sing across the album, the title actually refers to the encore – when suddenly the musician enters into a direct relationship with their audience and, guided by the atmosphere in the room, proffers them a spontaneous gift. Indeed, the French even call the encore a 'bis' or 'kiss'.

So here we have a disc of encores to hit all moods and genres: opening with a perkily fluttering and precise reading of the *Allegro di molto* from Piatigorsky's transcription of Haydn's Divertimento in D; Brahms and Popper; and top-of-the-pops picks such as Tchaikovsky's 'Valse sentimentale' and Saint-Saëns's 'Le cygne', which are both lightly floating, gently poetic, less-is-more readings to die for. All of which lands us at the wonderful final trio of works (albeit initially bittersweet-tinged at having to wave adieu to Tharaud). First, a haunting solo cello and tenor saxophone duet with Raphaël Imbert which begins with John Coltrane's *Alabama*, Queyras lyricising in his top registers over a deep, throbbing saxophone pedal, before morphing into the Sarabande from Bach's dark Solo Cello Suite in E minor, Imbert snaking melancholic high-register jazz improvisations around Queyras's intently listening lines.

Time has appeared to stand still through that pairing, and the impression continues through the intensity and extended techniques of Dutilleux's first *Strophe sur le nom de Sacher*. But then comes the most perfect and subtle gear-shift to finish, peace descending by way of a circling back to Haydn for the serene cello-solo *Adagio* from his Symphony No 13 in D, for which Queyras is exquisitely supported by the French period ensemble La Diane Française under Stéphanie-Marie Degand.

Which brings me to my final point: that while this isn't the first disc of encores that has held together as a cohesive programme – think of Alban Gerhardt's discs of Casals and Rostropovich encores (Hyperion, 9/11, 1/17), or Vilde Frang's 'Homage' to the virtuoso violinist-arrangers of the early 20th century (Warner, 1/18) – it does stand out for having brought cohesion to a far more stylistically and thematically diverse set of encores than is usual. Indeed, far from being a pick'n'mix standing at the ready to be chopped up into a multitude of playlists (not that I don't hope it doesn't turn up everywhere), this is a genuine, single, sublime work of art, and to achieve this from such a multi-angled selection takes unusual artistry. **Charlotte Gardner**

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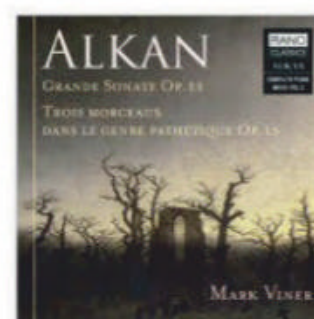
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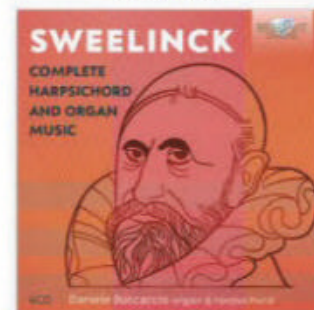
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GRAMOPHONE *Collector*

EXPLORING BEETHOVEN

David Threasher works his way through a number of recent Beethoven albums, including rarely heard works and arrangements



Young Beethoven: pianist Leonardo Miucci is joined by Meret Lüthis, Sonoko Asabuki and Alexandre Foster

Composer anniversaries offer an opportunity for reacquaintance, rediscovery, reappraisal and a host of other musical activities. This often works well when the composer is not of the first rank, and the major works can be dusted off to show how skilful, influential or otherwise important he or she was. When the composer is one of the great luminaries of the art, however, musicians, concert-givers and recording companies often face a quandary. The double Mahler celebration of a decade ago is a case in point. When virtually the entirety of the output forms the backbone of the concert repertoire, the only option is simply to do more of it. All the same, wonderful though the experience of a Mahler symphony or song-cycle is, it's not as if you ever have to wait long for the next one to come around.

Beethoven doesn't quite fall into the same category. Of course, orchestras are falling over themselves to offer symphony cycles; likewise pianists and violinists of the sonatas and concertos. There are wall-to-wall *Fidelios* and *Missae solemnes* during this anniversary year. *Gramophone* has already considered not one but three 'complete editions' of varying completeness (2/20). But all these

indisputable masterpieces come with baggage: there's a capacious hinterland to the great works and at times such as this musicians are entitled to feel emboldened to dust off the pieces that see the light of day less often, to throw the repertoire into relief.

Ah, repertoire – that word again. Nobody would dispute that the symphonies and concertos, the big choral and vocal works, the sonatas and string quartets are indispensable facets of 'the repertoire', presented to us over and over again on disc and in concert. Cellists, too, have reason to be thankful to Beethoven for providing the cornerstone of their Classical/Romantic repertoire.

Robin Michael is the latest to take on the five sonatas and the variations, which handily fit on a pair of discs. Michael's instrument is a modern reproduction of a Goffriller of 1695, over which he wields a pair of period-appropriate bows; Daniel Tong plays a Paul McNulty copy of a Walter fortepiano from around 1805. Michael draws a rich, throaty sound from his instrument, matched when Beethoven's writing is at its knottiest by the baritonal registers of Tong's keyboard. But the lighter tone of the variations is especially suited to this piano;

interleaved between the sonatas, the variations break up the weightier pieces ideally.

While string players are amply served by Beethoven, wind players have less to get their teeth into. There is, of course, the wonderful, youthful Septet, and there's the *Gassenhauer* Trio for clarinet, cello and piano that's often co-opted by standard piano trios. They make an ideal pairing and a disc by the **Berkeley Ensemble** follows only a few months after a similar one by Éric Le Sage and friends (Alpha, A/18, albeit with a trio arrangement of the Septet). Only a couple of moments of odd intonation above the stave detract from the pleasure of this tried-and-tested wind-and-strings coupling.

Flautists have it even harder. A disc from **Duo FlautoPiano** contains only one piece composed for this combination, and even that is buried in the 'WoO Anhang' section of the catalogue. Elsewhere are arrangements – most strikingly of the Horn Sonata – and a Duo for two flutes from 1792 that twitters away briefly and forgettably. Only an arrangement (by Theodor Boehm) of the *Adagio* of the First Symphony sticks in the mind, and there's a good reason for that.

All of the First Symphony was arranged by Hummel for flute, violin, cello and piano and it works rather well in a performance by **Uwe Grodd** and the **Gould Piano Trio**. Less persuasive is Hummel's take on the *Eroica*, a work whose size and weight bursts at the seams of this polite chamber group. Revolutions can be contained only by continents and trying to squeeze one into your salon is never going to happen. Not that these players don't lavish all their considerable skill upon it all the same.

Hummel also composed a *Grande Sonate* for mandolin and piano that turns up on a disc by **Julien Martineau** and his pianist **Vanessa Benelli Mosell**. The context is a series of four little movements by Beethoven for this combination, which are strangely affecting in their own way. Along with tributes to Beethoven by Fritz Kreisler and Corentin Apparailly (*b1995*), there is also an arrangement of the *Allegretto* of the Seventh Symphony that builds to a surprisingly momentous climax. The disc closes with an arrangement of Walter Murphy's *A Fifth of Beethoven*, drumkit and all – to be honest, the only moment during my listening that raised a chuckle of pleasure rather than a smile of appreciation.

The **Fine Arts Quartet** offer 'Fugues and Rarities', ranging from early versions of

Op 18 No 1 and the first movement of Op 131 – all elements instantly recognisable but caught at a point before Beethoven had marshalled his material into the indelible classic forms as we know them. Attempts at fugues both early and late (and a transcription of one from Handel's *Solomon*) trace the rocky road to the *Grosse Fuge*, with which the disc closes.

Then there is a sequence of three piano quartets from Beethoven's teenage years in Bonn. The composer's character is yet to be revealed; you notice scraps of themes in the process of forming but never quite becoming what they might in the hands of the mature master barely a decade later. The **Klaviertrio Hannover** present them alongside a transcription of the piano-and-wind Quintet, Op 16 – music that is unmistakably Beethovenian for all its reliance on a Mozartian model. An Italian foursome led by the pianist **Leonardo Miucci** offer the quartets for the first time on period instruments. Both are finely done, and only the choice of instruments or the added repertoire might sway your choice. If, indeed, these accomplished if anonymous works of a 15-year-old are how you wish to continue your Beethoven celebrations this year. **G**

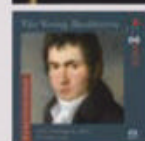
THE RECORDINGS



Beethoven Cpte Wks for Vc & Pf
Robin Michael, Daniel Tong
Resonus (M) ② RES10254



Beethoven Septet. 'Gassenhauer' Trio
Berkeley Ensemble
Resonus (F) RES10255



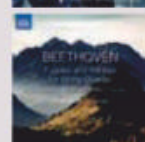
Beethoven Wks for Fl & Pf
Duo FlautoPiano
MDG (F) MDG903 2135-6



Beethoven Syms (arr Hummel)
Uwe Grodd; Gould Piano Trio
Naxos (B) 8 574039



Beethoven Wks for Mandolin & Pf
Martineau, Benelli Mosell
Naïve (F) V7083



Beethoven Fugues & Rarities
Fine Arts Quartet
Naxos (B) 8 574051



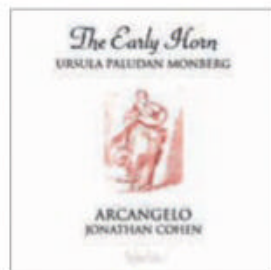
Beethoven Pf Qts. Pf Qt, Op 16a
Klaviertrio Hannover
Genuin (F) GEN19673



Beethoven Pf Qts
Lüthi, Asabuki, Foster, Miucci
Dynamic (F) CDS7854

'The Early Horn'

Anonymous Concertos – in E flat, Wenster/Lund 4; in E, Wenster/Lund 6 **CH Graun** Concerto, Wenster/Lund 7. Trio, Wenster/Lund 8 **Haydn** Divertimento a 3, HobIV:5 **L Mozart** Sinfonia da camera **WA Mozart** Horn Quintet, K407 **Telemann** Concerto a 3, TWV42:F14
Ursula Paludan Monberg *hn*
Arcangelo / Jonathan Cohen
Hyperion (F) CDA68289 (79' • DDD)



Ursula Paludan Monberg, born in 1982 in Aalborg, Denmark, is already

the doyenne of the natural horn, having occupied principal chairs with The English Concert, the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment, Arcangelo and others. A veteran of B minor Masses (including the *Gramophone* Award-nominated one by this ensemble – 11/14), she now makes her solo debut recording with a selection of pieces from the mid- and late 18th century.

Monberg is demonstrably a master of the instrument. Even with the later invention of valves, the horn remains notoriously difficult to play, so with just a mouthpiece and bell connected by several feet of brass tubing, to make anything approaching an expressive sound is an achievement. Fair enough that the recorder takes the lead in a concerto by Telemann; but the blend with oboe d'amore in an anonymous concerto in E and another in D by one of the Graun family shows why combinations of horn with the larger oboes became such a favourite of Bach, Haydn and others. Chromaticism is achieved by hand, squeezing and pinching notes from the bell. Tone quality is obviously never going to be even and it is fascinating to hear how this was seen by these composers not as a limitation but as a challenge. If the tuning becomes a little gamey higher up, that's a quirk of the instrument, not the player.

The star is predictably Mozart's Horn Quintet, which closes the disc. The extra twist here is that the edition used is by JA André, who was the prime mover behind so many first printed editions of Mozart's music after the composer's death. Apparently the work was best known in an arrangement for string quintet, and this is the first printing to restore the horn part, albeit with a few minor cuts and some of the difficult lower notes transposed up an octave. It's well worth waiting for at the end of the disc, the athleticism of its closing Rondo echoing the *Sinfonia da camera* by Mozart's father with which the programme opens. If the quintet towers above the rest

of the music here, it's nevertheless fascinating to hear what was expected of the horn players of the time. **David Threasher**

'Richard Strauss and the Viennese Trumpet'

Beethoven Variations on 'God save the King', WoO78 (arr Jones) **Bruckner** Ave Maria III **Fux** Sonata, K347 (arr Jones) **Mahler** Urlicht **Schubert** Sonatina, K408 (arr Freeman-Attwood) **R Strauss/Oehler** Trumpet Sonata 'after Richard Strauss' **Webern** Piece in G (arr Freeman-Attwood) **Zemlinsky** Lied der Jungfrau, Op 13 No 3
Jonathan Freeman-Attwood *tpt* **Chiyan Wong** *pf*
Linn (F) CKD621 (61' • DDD)



In James Blish's story *A Work of Art*, scientists in an art-starved future use

the music of Richard Strauss to recreate the composer's personality. Duly reincarnated, he's put to work writing new masterpieces: only to find that, being made of nothing else, he's unable to do anything except recycle his old ideas and mannerisms. It's fun to imagine the sort of music the synthetic Strauss might have created: presumably something very like this trumpet sonata 'after Strauss', created with enormous skill by Thomas Oehler and *Gramophone's* own Jonathan Freeman-Attwood.

It's almost entirely assembled from existing works by Strauss, and spotting which ones could make an entertaining party game. Stretches of the Violin Sonata dominate the first movement, there's a cheeky glimpse of Zerbinetta in the finale, and a slice of *Zarathustra* serving as a lush slow movement. Taken in the right spirit, it's rather good, and an extensive booklet-note tells the story of how two intelligent and imaginative musicians set about solving this fascinating 'what if'. Needless to say, it's played with supple, shining lyricism and considerable verve by Freeman-Attwood and pianist Chiyan Wong.

The rest of the disc is good value too: all transcriptions of works by Viennese masters, of which Beethoven's Variations on 'God save the King' get the most extensive – not to say mischievous – makeover. A 'sonata' assembled from pieces by Fux is sprightly and stylish, there's a rapt account of Mahler's 'Urlicht', and the pair play Schubert's G minor Sonatina with a playful sense of Schubertian style. It all adds up to a very appealing recital; a perfect gift for the trumpet player in your life or indeed any Straussian who isn't overly concerned with authenticity. **Richard Bratby**

Mirella Freni

In honour of the Italian operatic soprano who died in February aged 84, **Richard Fairman** fondly remembers a 'familiar friend' who over 50 years of performing barely seemed to age

About 10 years ago, the Glyndebourne Festival put out a recording of *L'elisir d'amore* on its historic CD label. The performance dates from 1962 and is recommendable for many reasons, but not the least of them is the pristine singing of its Adina, Mirella Freni. Her voice shines out as pure and gleaming as if she were standing in front of us today.

The Glyndebourne recordings are an ideal introduction to the young Freni as she set out on her international career. Her debut there in 1960 as Zerlina in *Don Giovanni* survives on a live recording (one would have to search around for it), and Glyndebourne itself has put out *Le nozze di Figaro*, also from 1962, in which Freni is the most delightful of Susannas (try her sparkling 'Venite, inginocchiatevi', given a nimble lift by conductor Silvio Varviso).

Those who only heard Freni later should still recognise her. That is probably why her death, in her home town of Modena, Italy, in February, felt like losing a familiar friend. Over half a century of performing, from 1955 to 2005, she hardly seemed to age, recognisably the same bright-eyed figure, the same perfectly schooled voice.

Freni was the Italian soprano through and through – clear of focus, bright of tone, forward with the words, so that each vowel was distinct and alive. These are the same virtues that we hear in her Modenese childhood friend Luciano Pavarotti, who almost sounds like her tenor twin. The story of how they shared the same wet nurse as babies is well known, and it does make one think, 'Whatever was in that milk?'

There were other features they shared too, as Freni recalled, 'Luciano used to tell journalists, "We did everything together, except make love"! But there is one particular thing common to them both: they enjoyed long careers, in which their voices never let them down. Freni, especially, was to follow a remarkable vocal journey, starting out from the lightest of soprano roles and ending up not far off the dramatic soprano summit.

Freni's singing was clear of focus, bright of tone, forward with the words, so that each vowel was distinct and alive

My first encounter with Freni in the theatre was the (now legendary) La Scala production of *Simon Boccanegra* in 1976. She gave an object lesson in *bel canto*: not much variety of tone, but a taut and eloquent vocal line, no wobble, no unevenness of any kind. The Abbado DG recording, released the following year, is a true record.

Of all her roles, the one that was always by her side was Mimì in *La bohème*. It counted among her earliest appearances in opera in 1958 and was the role of her Metropolitan Opera, New York, debut in 1965. She was

often to be found singing it alongside Pavarotti's Rodolfo, the childhood friends still paired as Mimì and Rodolfo when the centenary production of the opera came round in Turin

in 1996 ('two senior citizens', they joked about themselves). In the Decca recording conducted by Herbert von Karajan, they are unsurpassed in their generation as the perfectly matched, all-Italian leading couple.

It was Karajan who promoted Freni as the lead Italian soprano of her day, pressing her to move on to heavier roles. A run of the later Verdi roles followed (Desdemona, Elisabetta di Valois, Aida), all performed live at Salzburg and recorded in the studio in Karajan's fashion. 'There were many who said I would kill myself with some of the roles I did, but I always knew what I was capable of,' she said. The recordings show why: Freni never wavered from her *bel canto* style, protecting her voice from damage.

She was also selective about which operas she did. 'The most important word in a singer's life is "No",' she declared, decisively. Offers of *Il trovatore* and *Turandot* were declined, and she only sang *Madama Butterfly* on film (a fine one from 1975, directed by Jean-Pierre Ponnelle). 'I knew perfectly well [Turandot] wasn't right for me, even on record. I have never been afraid of saying no, even to Karajan!'

In later years a new partnership emerged, as she sang frequently alongside her second husband, Nicolai Ghiaurov. I recall with pleasure her brilliantly sung,

DEFINING MOMENTS

•1955 – *Opera debut*

Sings Micaëla in *Carmen* in her home town of Modena

•1960 – *International breakthrough*

Debut at Glyndebourne as Zerlina in *Don Giovanni*

•1963 – *Partnership with Herbert von Karajan*

Freni and Karajan are acclaimed in *La bohème* at La Scala, Milan

•1978 – *Marriage creates operatic power couple*

Her second marriage is to leading Bulgarian bass Nicolai Ghiaurov

•1979 – *High-water mark*

Aida at Salzburg under Karajan marks her heaviest Verdi role


•2005 – *Farewell to opera*

Freni's last operatic appearance is as the teenage Joan of Arc in Tchaikovsky's *The Maid of Orléans* in Washington DC; she dies 15 years later, on February 9, 2020, at her home in Modena



if not especially vulnerable, Marguerite in *Faust*, teamed with Ghiaurov's imposing Méphistophélès. Among a select group of Russian operas, none suited her better than *Eugene Onegin* – and I can still picture her dignified Tatyana (she was already 53 at the time) on the arm of Prince Gremin, her husband in real life as well as on stage.

During her last years, Freni was often hailed as the last of a dying Italian tradition, 'the end of a chain', as Plácido Domingo described her. She was proud of her longevity, and justifiably so. Even on the

culsp of 80, she was fending off requests to sing. 'They often say, "Cantare ancora! Signora, you can still sing, why don't you?"' she recalled. 'I say, "I know I can, but I don't want to." *Finito, basta.*' 

THE ESSENTIAL RECORDING



Puccini *La bohème*

Freni *sop* Pavarotti *ten* Panerai *bar* Ghiaurov *bass* Deutsche Oper Chor, Berlin; Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra / Herbert von Karajan

Decca (8/73)

The role that accompanied Freni throughout her career is heard in a luxury studio recording made in conjunction with a Salzburg Festival production. She is teamed with her three closest colleagues: childhood friend Luciano Pavarotti, second husband Nicolai Ghiaurov and longtime supporter Herbert von Karajan.

Instrumental



Jed Distler listens to Granados in the hands of Jean-Philippe Collard:

'Besides being a great colourist and technician, Collard is an honest performer who takes Granados's directives to heart' ► [REVIEW ON PAGE 91](#)



William Yeoman hears guitarist Gianluigi Giglio play Fernando Sor:

'Giglio has a remarkable ear for the latent expressivity of a single tone, whether in isolation or in company' ► [REVIEW ON PAGE 94](#)

Beethoven

Piano Sonatas – No 29, 'Hammerklavier', Op 106; No 32, Op 111

Filippo Gorini *pf*

Alpha Ⓢ ALPHA591 (73' • DDD)



Two years ago it was the *Diabelli* Variations; now 24-year-old Filippo

Gorini is scaling scarcely less Himalayan peaks. And I find it hard not to cut-and-paste from my review of his previous disc (10/17). His playing is once again technically irreproachable, tasteful and mature. Yet once again it is not inclined to follow Beethoven to the outer extremes of risk-taking or spiritual exploration.

I certainly don't want to fall into the 'how dare he?' syndrome, especially when the outer movements of the *Hammerklavier* display such compelling energy, drive and sweep. But I cannot but feel that the Scherzo is a little on the sane side, while the *Adagio sostenuto*, finely paced though it is, neither scales the heights nor plumbs the depths.

In Op 111 the first movement is once again consummately musical, though arguably a little over-integrated, its drastic contrasts smoothed over rather than exposed. The Arietta poses a bigger problem, because Gorini here ignores Beethoven's *L'istesso tempo* markings. Thus his first variation is faster than the theme, the second is a good deal faster than the first, and he slams on the brakes for the third. He may be far from alone in taking these options but the effect is to destroy any sense of accumulating pressure before the dam breaks. Not only that, but in the third variation he goes so far towards equalising the long and short notes that the innocent ear might suppose they were actually notated as equal in length.

None of this is to say that this well-recorded disc does not deserve to open more doors for the richly gifted young Italian. He may even return to these

works in the future with interpretations that earn him a place in the pantheon. I just wish he didn't seem so determined to reach for that status so soon. **David Fanning**

Beethoven

Piano Sonatas – No 30, Op 109; No 31, Op 110; No 32, Op 111

Maurizio Pollini *pf*

DG Ⓢ 483 8250GH (56' • DDD)

Recorded live at the Herkulessaal, Munich, June 24-26, 2019



For pianists and music lovers who came of age in the 1970s and '80s,

Maurizio Pollini's Beethoven recordings were considered the modern-day gold standard. Pollini's approach to the composer was characterised by an objective classical rigour and avoidance of artifice channelled through an unflappable technique that permitted no vagaries, smudges or imbalances. The purity of his sonority, moreover, was underlined and perhaps exaggerated in the last three sonatas by DG's close-up, analytic engineering, a far cry from the robustness and expansive rhetoric of Claudio Arrau's antipodal Philips traversals.

Re-recording these works in concert nearly 45 years later, Pollini's technique remains remarkably intact and supple, notwithstanding an ever-so-slight loss of definition in double-note passages, if one must be picky. Nor have his interpretations significantly changed over time, although certain details differ considerably. The main change concerns DG's distant and diffuse sonic perspective, which reflects how you'd hear Pollini's Steinway grand from the vantage point of an orchestra seat situated in the back rows of a large venue. In place of razor-sharp definition, the piano tone conveys added warmth, ambience, nuance and dynamic range.

As a consequence, Pollini's firmly held tempo relationships in Op 109's

improvisatory opening movement seem to acquire more breathing room, abetted by the bass notes' resonant ring, while his *attacca* launch into the *Presstissimo* makes a startling impact. Pollini takes the third movement's theme and first variation slightly faster now, but his subjective, legato-tinged and melody-orientated parsing of Var 2 surprisingly contrasts with his erstwhile *détaché*. If the studio Var 3 emphasised clarity over speed, here Pollini throws caution to the wind, while Var 5's tricky counterpoint similarly swaggers.

The younger Pollini infused Op 110's opening *Moderato* with discreetly expressive give and take; here the pianist yields no quarter. His *Allegro molto* remains as bracing as before but now with additional urgency and angularity. The same applies to the Arioso's central climax and the final fugal statement's exultant cumulative power. 'Purposeful bleakness' was how my late American colleague Harris Goldsmith described Pollini's fusion of high-octane technique and architectonic focus throughout Op 111. Notwithstanding a few rushed phrase-endings and smudges in the heat of battle (or maybe because of them), the present rendition seems far more contrasted and communicative. I've long given up complaining about Pollini's audible vocal grunts and grimaces.

Jed Distler

Selected comparison:

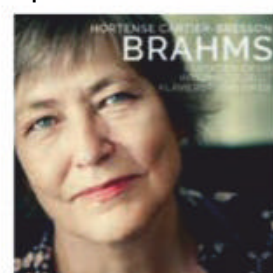
Pollini (1/78^R, 7/90^R) (DG) 449 740-2GOR2

Brahms

Piano Pieces – Op 116; Op 117; Op 118

Hortense Cartier-Bresson *pf*

Aparté Ⓢ AP222 (62' • DDD)



The French pianist Hortense Cartier-Bresson, who studied with Yvonne Loriod and György Sebők, now teaches at the Paris Conservatoire and is artistic director of the chamber music festival Musique à La



Energy, drive and sweep: Filippo Gorini shows that age is no barrier to impressive late Beethoven although greater spiritual identification may need time

Prée. Her most recent recording is devoted to late works of Brahms.

Throughout, Cartier-Bresson is sensitive to Brahms's polyphony above all. Her interpretations suggest and beckon rather than insist, with an extraordinarily refined pianism that disguises Brahms's relentlessly chordal textures and dark palette, imbuing each piece with individual character. She makes a strong case for conceiving Op 116 as an integral entity, highlighting thematic and affective echoes within the set.

In the midst of the energised rhythmicity of the G minor Ballade (Op 118 No 3), the B major middle section emerges as an island of exquisite calm. The F minor Intermezzo (No 4) is precisely *poco agitato* – a little agitated – as Brahms indicates, rather than the customary veering near the edge of psychotic break. Disturbances here, though real, are beneath the surface, lending the performance a particular mystery. The bleak vision of the E flat minor Intermezzo (No 6) is conveyed with grace and poise, suggesting tragedy without resort to theatrics.

Among the more lyrical pieces, the A major Intermezzo's eloquence (No 2) derives from its unaffected simplicity.

A strikingly beautiful F major Romance (No 5) maintains its long melodic contours effortlessly, with a middle section that speaks of another life before perfectly wrought trills transport us back to the present.

Cartier-Bresson's performances are subtle to the point of reticence, gradually revealing their secrets in repeated listening. Their deeply felt musicality is bound to strike an appealing chord with Brahms connoisseurs. **Patrick Rucker**

Buxtehude

'Buxtehude by Arrangement - The Complete Piano Transcriptions by August Stradal' Chaconnes - BuxWV159; BuxWV160. Passacaglia, BuxWV161. Preludes and Fugues - BuxWV140; BuxWV142; BuxWV143; BuxWV145; BuxWV146; BuxWV150; BuxWV153

Meilin Ai *pf*

Toccata Classics © TOCC0534 (84' • DDD)



Toccata Classics continues its mission on behalf of the piano transcriptions of

August Stradal (1860-1930), covering compositions by Bach, Wagner, Liszt (with whom Stradal studied) and now Buxtehude. Stradal's 10 transcriptions of Buxtehude organ works appear all together here in premiere recordings with the talented young pianist Meilin Ai, adding up to nearly 84 generous minutes of playing time on a single disc. The obvious parallel for this body of work is found in Liszt's piano versions of Bach organ works, in that both transcribers resist the easy temptation to replicate the organ's resonant overtones and thick registrations, aiming instead for contrapuntal clarity and subtle textural deployment. At the same time, Stradal's dynamic markings and tempo modifications are unquestionably born out of a Romantic rather than Baroque aesthetic.

Compare, for example, how Stradal rhapsodically navigates the E minor Chaconne's landscape, in contrast to the stricter, steadier tread that a Baroque organist such as Kenneth Gilbert favours. Yet Ai's astute clarification and contouring of contrapuntal lines prevents the piano-writing from ever sounding garish or overloaded. As a result, the A minor

Fugue's grand climaxes and pedal points are full-bodied without bursting at the sonorous seams. Her sensitivity of phrasing and timing of the rests in the E minor BuxWV143's second fugue brings understated drama to a piece that does not often inspire organists beyond the perfunctory. One might quibble with Ai's habitual phrase-end ritards that occasionally impede the great D minor Passacaglia's majestic flow. Yet from the quiet exposition to the massive chordal writing, her varied and well-controlled articulation makes the long F major Fugue appear more musically eventful than it actually is.

It was smart for Ai to make her solo CD debut in previously unrecorded piano repertoire, where she has the field all to herself. That said, I hope to hear her in a wider range of music. All transcription mavens should know about and investigate this release. **Jed Distler**

Clementi

'Complete Piano Sonatas, Vol 1'

Keyboard Sonatas - Op 1; Op 7; Op 13 No 6; Op 25 No 5 (Op 26 No 2); Op 40 No 2; 'Didone abbandonata', Op 50 No 3

Giacomo Scinardo *pf*

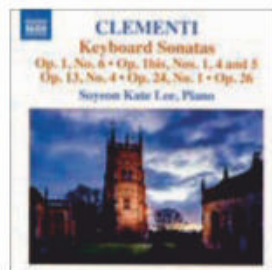
Sony Classical © ② 19075 97348-2 (137' • DDD)

Clementi

Keyboard Sonatas: Op 1 No 6; Op 1bis - No 1; No 4; No 5; Op 13 No 4; Op 24 No 1; Op 26

Soyeon Kate Lee *pf*

Nimbus © 8 573922 (74' • DDD)



Muzio Clementi's 250th birthday was celebrated in 2002 with scholarly conferences in Perugia and Rome. Two years earlier, Ut Orpheus, the Bologna publisher, embarked on a projected 60-volume complete works, some 39 volumes of which have appeared. Alan Tyson's 1967 thematic catalogue and Leon Plantinga's 1977 life-and-works laid solid foundations for more recent scholarship, including David Rowland's edition of the correspondence in 2010. Since Horowitz's pioneering LP in 1954, pianists ranging from Michelangeli, Tipo and Spada to Alexander-Max, Szokolay, Gilels, Demidenko, Staier, Zilberstein, Van Immerseel and Ciccolini have recorded Clementi. Costantino Mastroprimiano was apparently the first to record all the sonatas, using various

antique instruments (Brilliant Classics), followed by Howard Shelley playing a modern Steinway (Hyperion).

They are now joined by Giacomo Scinardo, whose first volume of the complete sonatas is out on Sony Classical. His selection spans Clementi's career, from the six *style galant* Op 1 Sonatas from 1771 to the last sonata of Op 50, published in 1821, with stops along the way for the Viennese Sonatas, Op 7, and later works written both in London and abroad. While Scinardo's sincerity of purpose is never in doubt, his approach to individual sonatas seems uneven at best.

In the celebrated G minor Sonata (Op 7 No 3), Scinardo's ambiguous phrase shapes, casual articulation and faint dynamic contrasts rob the work of a good bit of its pathos. In *Didone abbandonata* (Op 50 No 3), scant differentiation between *forte* and *fortissimo*, combined with a general disregard of *sforzando* accents, diminishes the rhetorical and affective impact of this *scena tragica*. At the opposite end of the emotional spectrum, Scinardo's readings of the precocious Op 1 Sonatas seem almost perfunctory rather than an augury of things to come. Close microphone placement results in obtrusive sound distortion on occasion.

Soyeon Kate Lee, the Korean-American pianist who won the 2010 Naumburg Competition, is the latest contributor to the Naxos survey of Clementi's keyboard works. Her programme consists of sonatas published between 1771 and 1791, including revised versions of three of the Op 1 Sonatas.

Lee's characterful playing is full of life, intelligence and wit. No pianistic gesture is without emotive impetus. The two three-movement Sonatas, F major (Op 24 No 1) and B flat major (Op 13 No 4), are satisfyingly proportionate, each with a deeply expressive *Adagio* that reminds us that, despite the fact that Clementi became a polished English gentleman, he harboured in the marrow of his bones a true Italian lyric gift. The single sonata from Op 1 presented in its original form rather than in a later revision, the sixth in E major, exudes an unpretentious, ingratiating charm. The 'learned' Clementi even gets an outing in the A minor Fugue (Op 1bis No 5), its discursive progress delivered with clarity and élan. And should you wonder what exactly about Clementi's piano-playing so intrigued his contemporaries, listen to Lee's vibrant performance of the *Arietta con variazione* finale of Op 24 No 1 for what Plantinga has called 'as good as any piano music of the time'. **Patrick Rucker**

Debussy - Rameau



Debussy Children's Corner - No 3, Serenade for the Doll; No 4, The Snow is Dancing.

La damoiselle élue - Prélude. Estampes - No 3, Jardins sous la pluie. Images - Book 1 No 2, Hommage à Rameau. Préludes: Book 1 - No 6, Des pas sur la neige; No 8, La fille aux cheveux de lin; Book 2 - No 8, Ondine
Rameau La Cupis. Les Cyclopes. L'Égyptienne. L'enharmonique. L'entretien des Muses. Gigue en rondeau II. L'indiscrète. La Joyeuse. Menuet II. Musette en rondeau. La poule. La Rameau. Le rappel des oiseaux. Rigaudon II. Les sauvages. Tambourin. Les tendres plaintes. Les tourbillons. La Villageoise

Rameau/Ólafsson The Arts and the Hours

Vikigur Ólafsson *pf*

DG © 483 7701; © ② ④ 483 8283 (79' • DDD)



After reviewing Vikigur Ólafsson's disc of Bach (11/18)

I was eager to hear

what he'd do next and this certainly doesn't disappoint. The disc is simply titled 'Debussy Rameau'. It could have been a triumph of style over substance but, like the Bach, the programming here is truly inspired.

Debussy was a big admirer of his French forebear, finding a 'perfect taste and strict elegance which make up the consummate beauty of his music'. We begin with the beguiling Prélude from *La damoiselle élue* in Debussy's own transcription, which sets the tone and immediately establishes the fineness of the instrument and the recording. Ólafsson groups the Rameau together very effectively: the first set, for instance, all from the 1724 *Pièces de clavecin*, begins with 'Le rappel des oiseaux' - full of energy without the accents becoming jabby, the sustaining pedal used judiciously - followed by the strutting dance of the 'Rigaudon', with wonderful interplay between the contrapuntal lines; the 'Musette en rondeau' then relaxes the mood, while in the 'Tambourin' he conjures the brilliance of the harpsichord's sound world, giving the closing phrases a real grace (something of an Ólafsson trademark). 'La Villageoise' is full of character, the middle section becoming still more energised, while the 'Gigue en rondeau' is lovingly done - in a lesser artist the ornamentation could have sounded overstated, but not here.

Placing Debussy's 'Jardins sous la pluie' (*Estampes*) next makes you realise how much its composer learnt from the great toccata tradition, emphasised by the verve with which Ólafsson approaches it. What

follows explores the same train of thought – from *Children's Corner* the ‘Serenade for the Doll’ (though he’s less anarchic here than Steven Osborne – Hyperion, 10/17) and ‘The Snow is Dancing’, in which he effectively blurs the textures as the harmonies become more hazy. And so it continues, the two composers sounding very at home with one another.

The highlights are many: the way the shadows of ‘Des pas sur la neige’, with its upward phrases, are dismissed by the cascading downward scales of ‘La Joyeuse’ from the 1724 *Pièces de clavecin*, a mood intensified by ‘Les Cyclopes’, built similarly on descending patterns but even more frenetic (the pianist’s complete control of dynamics and colours makes this a particular highlight). And he makes the most well-known pieces his own without caricature: ‘La poule’, its repeated chords effortlessly dispatched, or ‘Les sauvages’, which Ólafsson laces with ever more outlandish ornamentation. As a centrepiece he offers *The Arts and the Hours*, an interlude that he has arranged from Rameau’s last opera, *Les Boréades*, in which the octogenarian’s highly characteristic harmonic language gets ever more daring.

Where else could Ólafsson end but with ‘Hommage à Rameau’ from *Images*, Book 1? It not only brings the two composers together but offers the perfect distillation of all that has gone before.

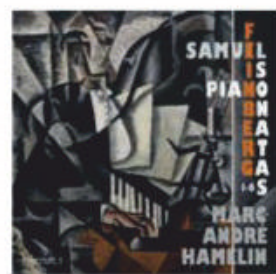
Harriet Smith

Feinberg

Piano Sonatas – No 1, Op 1; No 2, Op 2; No 3, Op 3; No 4, Op 6; No 5, Op 10; No 6, Op 13

Marc-André Hamelin *pf*

Hyperion © CDA68233 (75' • DDD)



What happened to the great Russian composer-pianist tradition in the

decades after the death of Scriabin and the emigration of Rachmaninov, Prokofiev and Stravinsky, and before the advent of Shostakovich and Prokofiev’s return? Step forward Samuil Feinberg (1890–1962). As a pianist his legacy has always been more or less secure, thanks mainly to the aura of his Bach recordings. As an arranger, too, he is no stranger to piano buffs – for a jaw-dropping treat, track down Lazar Berman in Feinberg’s working of the Scherzo from Tchaikovsky’s *Pathétique*. But as a composer? You would have to have invested in the two BIS CDs of his 12 piano sonatas, shared between Nikolaus Samaltanos and Christophe Sirodeau. Failing that, you

could now go for the tried-and-tested Hamelin brand, reassured that the more notes per second – and Feinberg is up there with the notiest of them – the more the Canadian virtuoso is in his element.

Five of the first six sonatas (composed between 1915 and 1923) are in a single movement, and instantly the example of Scriabin comes to mind. Harmonies, textures and gestures soon confirm the affinity, which is unsurprisingly especially strong in the first two sonatas. But then the three-movement Third Sonata detonates the Scriabin legacy, maximalising and integrating it with a heroic-complexitist trajectory, above all in a finale that throws down the gauntlet to the most intrepid of piano tigers (Feinberg was himself from Odessa, cradle of so many of that breed). After that, the Fourth, Fifth and Sixth Sonatas are a mite less extravagant but still determined to cultivate exotic new varieties in their respective steamingly chromatic hothouses.

Hamelin does far more than tame these pianistic leviathans. He gives them momentum, character and individuality. As it happens, Samaltanos and Sirodeau have little or nothing to fear from the comparison. All three pianists have plenty of aces up their sleeves, and if Hamelin has some extra trump cards in terms of sheer bite, finesse and imaginative pedalling, then the BIS pair still offer a very personal reaction to Feinberg’s mysticism and craziness. So might the recording quality prove a deciding factor? No, because both are fine, while at times in both the piano is audibly – and wholly understandably – under strain in the top octave. The two issues also have equally informative, indeed usefully complementary booklet notes. So it’s time to dust off that most annoying of clichés: you really need both, not least because Hamelin reinstates the original manuscript version of the first two movements of the Third Sonata.

David Fanning

Comparative version:

Samaltanos, Sirodeau (BIS) BIS-CD1414

Granados

Goyescas, Op 11

Jean-Philippe Collard *pf*

La Dolce Volta © LDV73 (54' • DDD)



Given that Jean-Philippe Collard revels in music containing great harmonic subtlety (Fauré) and textual intricacy (Rachmaninov), it’s not surprising

how eloquently he fares with Granados’s *Goyescas*. Besides being a great colourist and technician, Collard is an honest performer, who usually takes Granados’s mercurial tempo and expressive directives to heart. By carefully observing the differences between *forte* and *fortissimo* in the opening ‘Los requiebros’, the internal climaxes emerge in proper perspective, as do the difficult-to-voice simultaneous *cantabile* and *marcato* lines. You don’t get the fire and internalised poetry that Alicia de Larrocha’s four recordings or José Menor’s uniquely clairvoyant version serve up; Collard comes off like a classicist by comparison, and that’s perfectly valid.

Collard quietly unleashes his inner Fauré in ‘Coloquio en la reja’: rather than letting the top melodic line dominate throughout, the pianist brings the subsidiary voices and bass lines to the fore, on an equal footing. His rhythmic timing in ‘El fandango de candil’ maintains understated yet palpable swagger throughout the movement, as if he’s more of a conductor than a pianist. Collard shapes the arching lyrical lines of ‘La maja y el ruiseñor’ too inwardly and broadly for my taste; I prefer de Larrocha’s relative litheness and animation, especially in her 1962 EMI version. Collard ignores quite a few of the numerous ritards (but not the accelerandos!) in ‘El amor y la muerte’, yet by doing so he moves this long movement ahead, and, as a result, he organically absorbs the quotations from other movements into the narrative flow. Compared to de Larrocha’s *marcato* deliberation at the outset of the ‘Epilogo’, Collard may seem too brisk at first. He’s actually creating a frame of reference that will ultimately anchor and unify the movement’s tempo relationships, as well as its thematic connections with the opening movement.

Other *Goyescas* recordings include the Goya-inspired ‘El pelele’ as a bonus. Collard’s does not; but it doesn’t really matter when you consider this pianist’s seasoned mastery, not to mention La Dolce Volta’s customarily lavish booklet and excellent engineering. **Jed Distler**

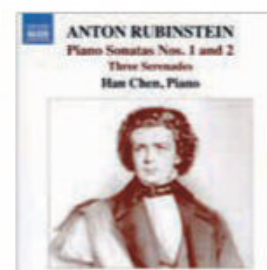
Rubinstein

Piano Sonatas – No 1, Op 12; No 2, Op 20.

Three Serenades, Op 22

Han Chen *pf*

Naxos © 8 573989 (78' • DDD)



As far as I know, this is only the third recording of Rubinstein’s

E minor Sonata and the second of the Sonata No 2. Han Chen, whose disc of Liszt operatic transcriptions for Naxos I warmly welcomed in the March 2016 issue, would seem to be the ideal candidate to revive these neglected works. Unhappily, I must record my disappointment. The music emerges as vapid and superficial in performances that, quite unlike his Liszt disc, I found workmanlike and literal. I may have fallen asleep during the second of the Three Serenades.

I was reminded of an entry in Albert Lockwood's *Notes on the Literature of the Piano* (1940). His opinion of Rubinstein's work, guided by Josef Lhévinne, one of the Russian master's greatest pupils, was that 'Rubinstein's music under his fingers certainly sounded better than it was, and now under less sympathetic fingers of later pianists it does not have the same effect'. Having sorted the wheat from the chaff in Rubinstein's output, Lockwood then makes particular mention of the First Sonata which 'contains most excellent ideas, intrinsically good, except that the first theme of the slow movement might be considered a trifle "angel-serenady".'

I gave the Sonata another go – in the recording Leslie Howard made in 1980 for Hyperion, one of the earliest on the label. What a difference! Apart from his consistently brisker tempos, here was a real pianistic force of nature at work, driving the narrative along with a blazing temperament that indeed made the music 'sound better than it was'. The last movement (*Moderato con fuoco*) of Sonata No 1, deemed 'impossible on one piano' by Lockwood, is a thrilling tour de force. For all its post-Mendelssohn inflections, it remains a remarkable work for a 20-year-old. The charming second-movement theme and variations of Sonata No 2 (8'11" in Howard's hands, a torpid 11'58" in Chen's) and even the relentless triplets of the finale held my attention, though I confess even Howard in his 1994 Hyperion recording of the Three Serenades failed to persuade me of their merits, one of those Rubinstein works which Lockwood characterises as 'essentially tedious because of aridity of thought'. **Jeremy Nicholas**

Piano Sonatas – selected comparison:

Howard (9/81^R, 5/90) (HYPE) CDD22007

Schubert

Piano Sonatas – No 18, D894; No 19, D958

Adam Laloum *pf*

Harmonia Mundi © HMM90 2660 (74' • DDD)



In my version of Utopia, all professional pianists would start their day by playing through at least one of Schubert's late sonatas, in order to fine-tune their emotional compass. But not all should end up recording them.

Adam Laloum came to attention 10 years ago after winning the Clara Haskil Competition and he has since been hailed by the French media with comparisons to Horowitz and Arrau. There is certainly no questioning his sensitivity and poetic nature, nor his command of the instrument. But for me his late Schubert hardly achieves the *état de grâce* attributed to it by his compatriot critics. Suffice to compare the opening of the C minor (D958) with Uchida, Perahia or Andsnes, for just a few instances, all of whom show the dramatic and narrative acuity that Laloum has yet to acquire. Or take the finale of the same sonata and sample the sweeping energy that animates every phrase in Uchida's account. Some might find her playing over-interpreted. Not me. But I certainly find Laloum's under-interpreted.

In the G major Sonata (D894) Laloum takes the *Molto moderato e cantabile* opening movement on the leisurely side. How to read Schubert's tempo marking is one thing. The problem is not so much with the tempo itself – Richter is notoriously even more expansive here. But Laloum has none of the Russian's amazing gift for unfolding a story, conveying little or nothing of the sense of dammed-up dramatic tension leading inevitably to an explosive climax. Nor is his *cantabile* particularly special – for a natural flow that allows each phrase to sing, I'm drawn once again to Uchida.

Anyone who has been watching and admiring Laloum's career may protest that his pianism and musicianship deserve a warmer welcome. Maybe they do. But for me there is no chance of his Schubert finding a place on the shelves among the greatest. Not yet, at least.

Michelle Assay

Selected comparison – coupled as above:

Uchida (12/97^R) (PHIL) 475 6282DB8

Piano Sonata No 18, D894 – selected comparison:

Richter (DECC) 480 8745

Piano Sonata No 19, D958 – selected comparisons:

Perahia (8/03) (SONY) S2K87706

Andsnes (7/07^R) (EMI/WARN) 516448-2

Schubert

'Vol 3'

Piano Sonatas – No 17, D850; No 19, D958

Llŷr Williams *pf*

Signum © ➔ SIGCD833 (73' • DDD)

Recorded live at Dora Stoutzker Hall, Royal Welsh College of Music & Drama, Cardiff, November 9, 2017; May 3, 2018

Schubert

'Vol 4'

Impromptus – D899; D935

Llŷr Williams *pf*

Signum © ➔ SIGCD834 (64' • DDD)

Recorded live at Dora Stoutzker Hall, Royal Welsh College of Music & Drama, Cardiff, February 1 & October 11, 2018



Michelle Assay's harsh yet accurate observations concerning Llŷr Williams's initial Schubert volumes (2/20) sometimes mirror my mixed responses to the pianist's third and fourth discs in a projected cycle devoted to this composer's sonatas. There's no questioning his technical command over Schubert's often unwieldy keyboard-writing (the D958 finale's relentless scales, the D935 No 4 Impromptu's double notes). Yet Williams's accomplishments often come up short via comparative listening.

Right at the beginning of the C minor Sonata's *Allegro*, I miss the supple shaping and countermelodies others divine from the accompaniment underneath the main theme's embellished statement (about 33 seconds into the movement). Nor do the extraordinary close-lying cross-rhythmic phrases in the development (starting around 6'11") generate the similar tension that pianists such as Claudio Arrau, Richard Goode and Radu Lupu bring to these passages.

Williams sustains his measured pace for the *Adagio* well, yet without the soupçon of transparency and flexibility that make Mitsuko Uchida's slower tempo actually seem faster. And there are crisper, suppler and more emotionally varied renditions of the rollicking finale to be had from Richter and Brendel. Williams's forthright and highly capable D850 would shine better in a less competitive catalogue, yet, again, one must reckon with Clifford Curzon's sharper inflection of the Scherzo's dotted rhythms and the individual profile with which Paul Lewis and Vladimir Ashkenazy circumvent the finale's potential for triteness.



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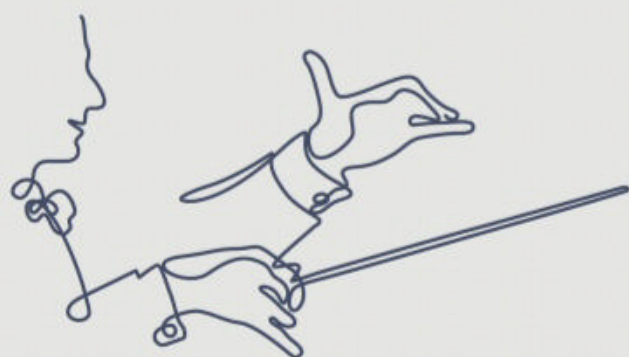
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If anything, the ‘lack of imaginative phrasing and predictable agogic hesitations’ MA cited in her reviews of Vol 1 and 2 become more apparent throughout Williams’s *Impromptus*. The C minor first of D899 starts out with sober simplicity, yet gets heavier and choppy as it unfolds, in contrast to, say, Maria João Pires’s ravishing *cantabiles* or Artur Schnabel’s hurling, visionary account. Williams’s scales in the E flat second come off comparatively tinkly next to Krystian Zimerman’s strings of pearls. On the other hand, Williams truly sings out the G flat third, finding a natural balance between the main melody and murmuring accompaniment that justifies the pianist’s slow and decidedly non-*alla breve* tempo. But his square and sectionalised parsing of D899’s concluding piece holds less interest. The D935 *Impromptus* have rarely sounded so dry and matter-of-fact, certainly when measured alongside Radu Lupu’s cultivation and sensitivity. Even Rudolf Serkin’s colourless and charmless late-period versions convey more drama and sinew. One hopes that Williams’s poetic capacity as a Schubertian will be more fully and positively realised in future volumes. **Jed Distler**

Sor

‘The 19th-Century Guitar’

Six Bagatelles, ‘Mes ennuis’, Op 43. Capriccio, ‘Le calme’, Op 50. Elegiac Fantasy, Op 59. Fantasy, Op 58. Les folies d’Espagne and Minuet, Op 15a. Introduction and Variations on a Theme by Mozart, Op 9. Introduction and Variations on ‘Marlborough s’en va-t-en guerre’, Op 28. The Movement of a Religious Prayer, Op 31 No 23

Gianluigi Giglio *gtr*

Somm Céleste © SOMMCD0604 (69’ • DDD)



The salon and pedagogical miniatures of the 19th-century

guitarist-composers Fernando Sor, Mauro Giuliani, Dionisio Aguado, Matteo Carcassi et al sound less at home on a modern concert guitar than they once did. Even generalists such as Gianluigi Giglio prefer to use period instruments and gut strings. It could almost be said that this repertoire grows in stature as the instrument shrinks.

This is because the bracing, smaller scale, narrower waist and lighter construction and string tension of an 1834 René Lacôte like the one played here both limit and enhance the tonal and dynamic range available to the

player. It is also because the physical act of using such an instrument alters one’s psychological and physiological perspectives. It is a generative engagement with the music that has little to do with attempts to reproduce it ‘as the composer intended’.

Listen to players such as William Carter, Ricardo Gallén, Stefano Grondona, Wulfin Lieske and David Starobin. A study becomes an *andante* for string quartet. A modest theme-and-variations becomes a symphonic event. It’s the same here, in a Sor recital that tapers sensitively from sets of variations through fantasies to pieces of sweet repose.

Giglio has a remarkable ear for the latent expressivity of a single tone, whether in isolation or in the company of its brethren. Moreover, his playing throughout is as lyrical as it is expository. But it is his accommodating himself to the instrument’s limitations in order to unlock the music’s true potential that proves truly revelatory. **William Yeoman**

J White

‘Piano Sonatas, Vol 2 – Later Sonatas’

Piano Sonatas – No 105; No 106; No 107; No 120; No 123; No 127; No 131; No 132; No 133; No 136; No 138; No 139; No 146; No 147; No 152; No 153; No 156; No 164

Jonathan Powell *pf*

Convivium © CR051 (64’ • DDD)



The sonatas of John White – 180 and counting – rank among the largest

and most varied corpuses of piano music in the post-war era. Nor have they lacked advocacy: Colin Kingsley’s pioneering selection (Lyrita) was followed by collections from Roger Smalley (NMC), Dave Smith (UHR) and Jonathan Powell, whose follow-up focuses on the sonatas composed during 1980–2008.

What comes across most clearly is White’s compendious knowledge and tangible enthusiasm for the piano repertoire, with an ease (never facility) in rendering this from a personal (never indulgent) perspective. Ranging in their duration from a 45-second birthday tribute to a seven-minute balletic ‘adage’, these 18 sonatas – all single movements – are never less than arresting in their expressive obliquity and technical finesse. Space precludes more inclusive discussion, but newcomers ought to sample No 105, with its joyous eliding of traits derived from

Busoni and Gershwin; No 127, with its pensive homage to Bill Evans; No 138, with its fond evocation of a scene from Molière; or No 164 in its calmly insistent pivoting between the ominous and the equivocal.

That said, the sequence as presented makes equal, if not better sense when heard as an entity evolving over and between individual sonatas – a tribute to the conviction Jonathan Powell invests in this never less than fascinating music. Highly realistic and detailed piano sound, along with an insightful overview of the composer and pertinent observations on each piece. Is it likely to build into a *Convivium intégrale* of White’s sonata odyssey? One can only hope so.

Richard Whitehouse

Widor

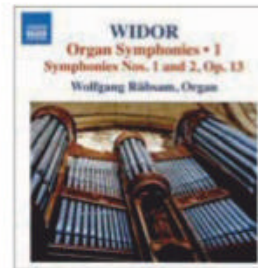
‘Organ Symphonies, Vol 1’

Symphonies – No 1, Op 13 No 1; No 2, Op 13 No 2

Wolfgang Rübsam *org*

Naxos © 8 574161 (84’ • DDD)

Played on the EM Skinner organ of Rockefeller Memorial Chapel, University of Chicago



The booklet with this first disc in the Naxos cycle of Widor organ symphonies informs us

that the restored 1928 EM Skinner organ in the Rockefeller Memorial Chapel of the University of Chicago is ‘the largest pipe organ in Midwest America’, with 132 ranks and 8565 pipes. More than enough, you would have thought, to do ample justice to the ‘combinations of colour, sonority and texture’ Widor was seeking out in his symphonies.

However, the overriding impression here is not of great size or timbral scope but of a surprisingly soft-hued and smoothly blended instrument, in which nothing really stands out but where everything coalesces into a homogeneous whole. Many will miss the aggressive reeds, the distinctly voiced solo flutes and the sheer raw power of a Cavallé-Coll, but this very smooth-toned instrument certainly bathes Widor’s music in comfortably warm hues.

Wolfgang Rübsam is no stranger either to recording (his personal discography amounts to over 100 recordings) or this particular instrument; he served as organist to the University of Chicago for almost a quarter of a century. That ease with the recording environment and that familiarity with the instrument results in performances which are, essentially,

comfortable, relaxed and graceful. He is not out to make big sweeping gestures or indulge in shock tactics; and while this allows us to hear the music of Widor unmolested by interpretative nuances designed to show off aspects of the instrument or the player, the general lack of distinguishing features means that after a while it all rather subsides into a hazy blur.

Under Rübsam the 'Marche pontificale' of the First Symphony lumbers along so ponderously it loses any sense of purpose, while the gentle 'Pastorale' of the Second seems so lumpy that it is difficult to follow quite where the music is going. But since neither the First nor the Second Symphonies of Widor have any of the big, dramatic movements which have made the subsequent ones (notably the Fifth) so popular, it is not entirely Rübsam's fault that this all sounds so featureless.

Marc Rochester

'Virtuoso Piano Transcriptions'

JS Bach Solo Violin Partita No 3, BWV1006

(arr Rachmaninov) - Prelude; Gavotte; Gigue

Gershwin Rhapsody in Blue **Liszt** Paraphrase de

concert sur Rigoletto, S434. Réminiscences de

Don Juan, S418 **Schubert/Liszt** Erlkönig, D328

(S558 No 4). Die Forelle, D550 (S563 No 6).

Gretchen am Spinnrade, D118 (S558 No 8)

J Strauss II Schatz-Walzer, Op 418 (arr Dohnányi)

Alessandro Taverna *pf*

Somm © SOMMCD0605 (73' • DDD)

Recorded live at Turner Sims, Southampton,

January 19, 2019



My colleague Harriet Smith wrote a mixed yet accurate and fair-minded

review for Alessandro Taverna's previous live CD recorded at the Turner Sims Concert Hall in these pages (7/17).

This transcription-orientated follow-up programme warrants similarly ambivalent comments. Taverna renders Rachmaninov's devilishly tricky Bach Partita No 3 transcriptions with unquestionable capability. Yet he doesn't match Daniil Trifonov's sparkle and scintillation (DG, 11/18), especially in the Gigue, which the latter dispatches nearly twice as quickly and five times as elegantly as Taverna does. It takes a while for Taverna to find his characterful centre in the Liszt/Mozart *Don Juan* Fantasy but once the 'Là ci darem la mano' theme establishes itself, so does the pianist's subtle palette of nuances and shadings.



Marc-André Hamelin and producer Andrew Keener take a break from Feinberg - see review on page 91

One only misses power and insouciance in the manner of Simon Barere, Earl Wild or Marc-André Hamelin.

Taverna's alluringly languid Schubert/Liszt *Gretchen am Spinnrade* markedly differs from Yuja Wang's suppler articulation and faster pace (DG, 6/12), in total contrast to his bubbly and dry-point *Die Forelle*. For all *Erlkönig*'s clean fingerwork and impressive octave stamina, the musical argument transpires on a seemingly uniform level, whereas other pianists - such as Murray Perahia, Idil Biret and, best of all, the legendary

Grigory Ginzburg - better differentiate foreground and background textures.

Taverna delivers a suavely shaped and freshly phrased Verdi/Liszt *Rigoletto* Paraphrase, followed by a Strauss/Dohnányi *Schatz-Walzer* that simply soars off the page. He should have ended the concert right then and there, on that high point. Instead, he concludes with a lurching, occasionally bombastic and generally unidiomatic rendition of *Rhapsody in Blue*: he's got the notes but not the style. Not that it matters to the cheering audience. **Jed Distler**

Huw Watkins

Geraint Lewis offers an appreciation of one of the finest young British composers who is making waves outside his native Wales

One of today's most respected and sought-after composers internationally is also a leading figure in Welsh musical life through his role as Composer-in-Residence with the BBC National Orchestra of Wales, which nominally concluded last year. Huw Watkins is also one of the most talented and versatile musicians of his generation and could easily have enjoyed a flourishing career just as a solo pianist, concerto player, chamber musician and accompanist. As it is, the two sides of his musical life cross-fertilise to colour and enrich each other with fluent creativity.

The Watkins household in South Wales must have been a busily vibrant musical environment when Huw and his older brother Paul were growing up in the 1980s. Their mother Hetty was a music teacher who also conducts local choirs and father John was a distinguished violin maker who turned his hand to the cello when Paul started to learn the instrument. In his turn Huw played the piano and later began to compose. One of the world's finest cellists, Paul is extrovert and gregarious – as suits an avid chamber musician (Nash Ensemble, Beaux Arts Trio and now the Emerson Quartet) as well as prize-winning conductor. Huw is quieter, more introverted – a perfectly complementary pair radiating prodigious talent, lightly worn.

Uniquely among his generation, he can breathe new life into established forms without artifice or pretension

A good starting point for an exploration of Huw Watkins's music can be found in recordings of two early works he wrote for Paul to play: the Sonata for cello and piano (2000) and the Sonata for cello and eight instruments (1999). The first disc intelligently traces a plausible musical lineage – from Bridge's D minor Sonata to his pupil Britten's Sonata in C (1961) and then to the Sonata (1984) by one of Huw's teachers, Alexander Goehr, before the Watkins Sonata itself. It soon becomes clear, however, that Watkins is no stylistic disciple of the latter – a sign, surely, of a good teacher and an independent pupil. His language in fact seems to preserve a degree of extended tonality arguably closer to Britten's own than to Goehr's well-known links to varied forms of serialism. Watkins's Sonata shows immediate fluency – ease of manner imbued with a natural flow – and formal ingenuity as well as an instinctively grateful understanding of the instruments from within. The disc is also a showcase for his brilliant piano-playing with its sense of intuitive support for his partner and an unobtrusive virtuosity.

The slightly earlier Sonata for cello and eight instruments is more of a mini-concerto – a work of startling imagination in which the cello brilliantly integrates with other colours while



A sensitive master of his art: Huw Watkins

also preserving a strikingly individual personality marked notably by an uninhibited lyricism. This work enjoyed a memorable kick-start as part of a scheme in 1998 when Faber Music asked 11 of its leading composers to nominate a younger composer to be commissioned to mark the approach of a new millennium. Thomas Adès selected Huw Watkins. It was an interesting choice in many ways, given that some had already sought to position Watkins as a somewhat 'conservative' figure. But Adès, significantly, championed a composer who gave obvious priority to solid compositional values – where the notes actually matter – as opposed to any one of many postmodernists where gimmick or surface are more important than logical and properly 'heard' content. It was an astutely foresighted selection too – not only in terms of the impressive score which resulted but as these last two decades have proved so eloquently. Watkins's music is now exclusively published by Schott Music.

So-called traditional 'craftsmanship' isn't such a surprising virtue to find in Watkins's music. As a schoolboy growing up in South Wales he must have heard the music of the leading figures Hoddinott and Mathias, and he had occasional lessons with the veteran composer-teacher Mervyn Burtch, himself a pupil of David Wynne. Burtch exemplified the virtues of clear-cut Hindemithian abstraction in much of his instrumental and choral music, and something of this clearly made an impact on the young Watkins in setting the foundation for a natural mode of expression. At Chetham's School in Manchester he was taught by Peter Lawson and on going up to King's College, Cambridge, his teachers included Goehr and his pupil Robin Holloway; moving on to the Royal College of Music he studied with the Goehr- and Holloway-pupil Julian Anderson – a sequence thus of seeming continuity but equally of disparate influences. Each would bring very different stylistic characteristics to bear in widening and enriching Watkins's horizons; but nevertheless he always



WATKINS FACTS

1976 Born in Gwent, South Wales, into a musical family

1994 Enters King's College, Cambridge, after study at Chetham's School

1998 Thomas Adès selects him for a Faber Millennium Commission

2001 Given the Constant and Kit Lambert Fellowship at the Royal College of Music

2012 *In the Locked Room* premiered at the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden

2015 Appointed the BBC National Orchestra of Wales's Composer-in-Residence

2016 Awarded the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center's Stoecker Prize


maintained a sense of self and a determined independence.

Huw Watkins's association with the BBC NOW began in 2000 when his Sinfonietta was played under Grant Llewellyn

at the Llanelli National Eisteddfod. Its immediate promise was clearly something to follow and subsequent commissions included a Piano Concerto in 2002 (for the composer himself to play) as well as a Double Concerto for viola and cello at the 2005 Proms. The consolidation as Composer-in-Residence was a natural step in 2015 and has led to several new works including a Cello Concerto for Paul in 2016 and the orchestral *Spring* of 2017, culminating in the luminous choral/orchestral *The Moon* at the 2019 Proms. But far from being a remote 'composer' only, the partnership has extended to programming favourite and influential works (Britten, Tippett and Goehr), performing concertos by Ravel and Britten and a valuable chance of mentoring young composers. Being a Professor of Composition at the Royal College of Music now brings teaching as a natural complement to Watkins's other skills.

In operatic terms Huw was also fortunate in being nurtured by award-winning Cardiff-based Music Theatre Wales between 2006 and 2012. This selection was specially designed to ease a young composer into the intricacies of writing for the musical stage – in an awareness of the pitfalls that can so easily handicap the inexperienced. After some isolated scenes from *Under Milk Wood*, Huw went on to work on the 25-minute *Crime Fiction* in 2008 with the distinguished poet and librettist David Harsent, a happy partnership which then led to the 50-minute *In the Locked Room* (based on Thomas Hardy), premiered in 2012 at the Royal Opera House's Linbury Theatre and subsequently revived both in the UK (RCM, 2018) and abroad (Hamburg State Opera, 2015). This last, in particular, displayed a consummate sense of intelligible word-setting (such a rare talent) as well as a compelling understanding of dramatic pacing. The rewards of this score are subtle and sophisticated – as opposed to being crudely theatrical – but provide eloquent testimony of what Watkins could do on a large scale when the right subject and opportunity present themselves. Time perhaps for Welsh

National Opera – who have yet to commission a significant Welsh composer to write a full-scale opera for the main-stage of their magnificent 'new' (2004) home in the Welsh Millennium Centre – to rise to the challenge ...

Even with such an impressive catalogue of achievement to his name it still feels – partly because of his youthful manner – as if Huw Watkins is a young composer, an impression nevertheless belied by the maturity of his expression and its construction. Uniquely among his generation of composers from the mid-1970s he can breathe new life into established forms without any sense of artifice or pretension – he has a deep knowledge and understanding of the heritage in which he is working and knows precisely when to break barriers and enter new ground without damaging the coherence of his argument. As an inherently intelligent and sensitive master of his art, it can be hoped with confidence that the next decades will bring further enrichment and consolidation to an output already paying special dividends for its rare qualities of imagination and integrity. 

ESSENTIAL HUW WATKINS RECORDINGS

Three albums that illustrate Watkins's compositional style

**'British Cello Sonatas'**

Paul & Huw Watkins

Nimbus  NI5699

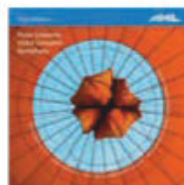
Recorded appropriately in Wales (in 2001), this disc was to be the first of many by the two brothers on many labels. This one traces a plausible 'family tree' of musical ancestry and culminates in Watkins's own Sonata of 2000, which admirably displays his structural imagination – three movements, ingeniously linked. Nimbus has exciting plans for further Watkins releases from 2020 onwards.

**'In my craft or sullen art'**

Sols incl Padmore, Ibragimova & P Watkins; Nash Ens

NMC Debut Discs  NMCD164 (9/12)

Opening with the landmark Sonata for cello and eight instruments (1999), this generous chamber compilation moves to a vivid set of four piano pieces based on Stanley Spencer paintings (2001), expertly played by the composer himself. He then accompanies Mark Padmore in the beautifully characterised *Three Auden Songs* (2009). The Partita for solo violin (2006) is a brilliant showcase for Alina Ibragimova and Padmore returns at the heart of the *Goodison Quartet* No 4 (2007), which encloses a moving setting of Dylan Thomas's great poem of creativity's essence.

**Flute Concerto. Violin Concerto. Symphony**

Walker, Ibragimova; BBC SO / Gardner; Hallé Orch /

R Wigglesworth NMC  NMCD224 (1/18)

A more impressive first orchestral disc from any composer can scarcely be imagined. The Violin Concerto for Ibragimova again was a highlight of the 2010 Proms and this astonishing performance is captured here. The Flute Concerto followed for the dazzling Adam Walker and the LSO in 2013 and the disc culminates with the Hallé-commissioned Symphony of 2016-17. Watkins has a fertile sense of spontaneous invention which he proceeds to transform with his masterly control of architectural evolution. This Symphony is manifestly one of the most searchingly achieved and eloquent scores of this century so far. A brilliantly played recording of essential new music.

Vocal



Alexandra Coghlan listens to the music of Thomas Tomkins: *'The quality of the treble-singing is superb, offering a crisper alternative to blowsier rival recordings'* ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 105**



Edward Breen explores Josquin's Spanish legacy with Contrapunctus: *'With such thrilling focus from the countertenors this ensemble mirrors the balance found on early discs by The Sixteen'* ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 107**

JS Bach

St John Passion, BWV245

Patrick Grahl *ten* Evangelist Peter Harvey *bass* Christus Elizabeth Watts *sop* Benno Schachtner *counterten* Matthias Winckhler *bass* Gaechinger Cantorey / Hans-Christoph Rademann Carus ② CARUS83 313 (108' • DDD • T/t)



Gaechinger Cantorey, the choir and orchestra of the Internationale

Bachakademie Stuttgart, opt for the 1749 revision of the *St John Passion*. Essentially Bach's final version returns to the same numbers as the original 1724 score (without any 1725 substitutions) but the words of a few numbers are altered; there are two unison flutes in 'Ich folge dir gleichfalls' (rather than just one) and a pair of muted violins (instead of violas d'amore) in 'Betrachte, meine Seel' and 'Erwäge' (now given the different text 'Mein Jesu, ach!'); archlute is eliminated; but now there is contrabassoon.

'Herr, unser Herrscher' launches with a compelling fusion of tension and clarity; two harpsichords, chamber organ (a replica of a Silbermann) and resonant orchestral bass instruments propel the roots of the twisting contrapuntal invocation with dramatic firmness. The 25-strong choir sing with precision, immaculate diction and discipline, and Hans-Christoph Rademann's sagacious direction nurtures timbral flexibility so that there is muscle and intensity in the *turba* scenes but also fulsome reflectiveness in chorales (some of them arguably a touch over-interpreted); the depth of instrumental and choral sonorities in 'Ruht wohl' has grave profundity.

The principal soloists are kept entirely separate from the choir. Evangelist Patrick Grahl narrates emotively, interacts seamlessly with Peter Harvey's serenely authoritative Christus and sings the tenor arias with grainy eloquence; 'Ach, mein Sinn' (the strings driving forwards with

intensity) comes across more persuasively than 'Mein Jesu, ach!', in which hard-edged singing makes an uneasy bedfellow for purling muted violins. Benno Schachtner's emphatic treatment of passing moments means that phrases are not sustained in 'Von den Stricken meiner Sünden', but 'Es ist vollbracht' is sung sublimely in dialogue with Sarah Perl's viola da gamba (the cello and double bass playing the continuo bass line in octaves combined with the organ realisation generates sorrowful density). Elizabeth Watts's dark-hued power means that 'Ich folge dir gleichfalls' is an expression of ardent strength, and 'Zerfliesse, mein Herze' is starkly emotional rather than merely beautiful (and the assorted concertante instruments play wonderfully). Matthias Winckhler's open-hearted 'Betrachte, meine Seel' is accompanied by vivid contrabass and gently bubbling organ; his bluff and hearty 'Mein teurer Heiland' is a bold counterfoil to the choir's soft interjections. Rademann's cultivation of searing textures and fruity solo singing may not offer perfect answers to every question raised by the work, but no single interpretation ever does.

David Vickers

Beethoven

Adelaide, Op 46. An die ferne Geliebte, Op 98. An die Geliebte, WoO140. An die Hoffnung, Op 32. An die Hoffnung, Op 94. Klage, WoO113. Der Liebende, WoO139. Lied aus der Ferne, WoO137. Sechs Lieder, Op 48. Acht Lieder, Op 52 - No 3, Das Liedchen von der Ruhe; No 4, Maigesang. Resignation, WoO149. Wonne der Wehmut, Op 83 No 1

Matthias Goerne *bar* Jan Lisiecki *pf* DG ② 483 8351 (69' • DDD • T/t)



With so many detractors, Beethoven Lieder are bound to acquire revisionist defenders, the latest being Matthias Goerne, whose status among the world's great Lieder singers suggests that his

position is more sincere than knee-jerk musicological perversity.

Beethoven indeed expanded the medium's range of possibilities mainly through the piano-writing, though his lack of literary insight in the vocal lines left the Lieder medium only partially transformed. His most notable contribution to the art form is *An die ferne Geliebte*, Op 98, which is often called the first song-cycle, with six Lieder integrated into a continuous piano part. But how often do you really want to hear it – and the Lieder that led up to it? Even in earnestly performed, well-recorded circumstances such as this disc, the answer would be 'every so often'.

In the album notes, Goerne suggests that Beethoven's Op 48 collection of six religious songs is the equal of *An die ferne Geliebte*, based on corrected editions that restore numerous cut stanzas. Neither Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau nor Hermann Prey left you feeling that you were missing anything, in performances with some Lieder cut down to a single stanza. With Goerne opening the cuts, I had hoped for some cumulative effect. But in these rather plain strophic songs with moralistic texts, I kept hearing Beethoven struggling to be Beethoven. There is unfairly neglected Beethoven out there (*Christus am Ölberge*, for example) but I just can't get on board with Op 48. I'd even say that starting the disc with these songs dulled my perceptions to the charm and flashes of depth that followed in 'An die Hoffnung' (both Opp 32 and 94), 'Adelaide' and, at the end of the disc, *An die ferne Geliebte*.

Though Goerne has some unexpectedly light, sweet, upper-range moments that I hadn't previously heard from him, his soft-grained voice feels undifferentiated for certain stretches and his reverence for the material seems to circumvent a more interventionist sensibility that might get closer to what Beethoven struggled to express. That's what the hyper-alert Fischer-Dieskau brought to Beethoven Lieder in his live Salzburg disc – and more of what one got from Goerne's own 2005 live recording of *An die ferne Geliebte* that hails



Tenderness and panache: Carolyn Sampson and Joseph Middleton offer a survey of 20th- and 21st-century English song – see review on page 106

from a different time, a different kind of focus as well as a somewhat different voice.

The major point of discovery here is Jan Lisiecki in his capacity as a Lieder accompanist. I greatly admire Lisiecki's recent set of Beethoven piano concertos (11/19), and any time this collection gives him something substantial to do, his crystalline lyricism comes to the fore. His playing is more impulsive and less considered than Alfred Brendel in Goerne's previous *An die ferne Geliebte* but still incredibly right in its own way. The periodic flourishes in the Op 32 'An die Hoffnung' unfold like pearl necklaces, where every note has its own glow but builds on what came before and leads to what comes after. **David Patrick Stearns**

Songs – selected comparisons:

Fischer-Dieskau, Moore (ORFE) C140 501B

Prey, Hokanson (CAPR) C5140

An die ferne Geliebte – selected comparison:

Goerne, Brendel (7/05) (DECC) 475 6011DH

Bernardi

Missa pro defunctis sex vocum. Ad te, Domine, levavi animam meam. De profundis clamavi ad te, Domine. Letanie a 4 concertate. Sinfonia quarta concertata. Sinfonia seconda concertata. Sinfonia terza concertata

Voces Suaves; Concerto Scirocco

Arcana Ⓢ A470 (68' • DDD • T/t)



Stefano Bernardi (c1577-1637) held eminent musical posts in his native

Verona but for about a decade he was the first Kapellmeister at the new cathedral in Salzburg (consecrated 1628). Choirbooks in its archives contain a large-scale *Missa pro defunctis* for six voices (1629), and this 'Salzburg Requiem' is imbued with captivating beauty by Voces Suaves (10 singers and theorbo) and Concerto Scirocco (violin, viola da braccio, cornett, three sackbuts, dulcian, violone and organ). The Swiss-based ensembles comprise international alumni of the prestigious Schola Cantorum Basiliensis, and the collective perform flawlessly without a director.

Finely judged sonorities, clarity of detail and flawless eloquence bespeak intelligently balanced musicianship. Much of the Requiem is softly penitent (the *Introitus* and *Kyrie*), with a few moments of bold declamatory vigour in the *Sequentia*

('Dies irae' and 'Lacrymosa' enriched with the full instrumental complement) alternating with reduced soloistic passages (such as ethereal sopranos accompanied only by organ in 'Oro supplex et acclinis') and sections of plainchant (sung sweetly by the tenors). The suspension-laden *Sanctus* has close intimacy between precise voices and their plangent doubling instruments. It is a clever touch that Arcana's cover image is Ignazio Solari's painting *Burial of Christ* (c1625-30) in Salzburg Cathedral's presbytery, and there is also an essay by the cathedral's music collection librarian Eva Neumayr that sets Bernardi's Requiem into the context of musical culture in early 17th-century Salzburg.

Much more overtly modern-style *concertato* writing is displayed in Bernardi's eight-part offertory motet *Ad te, Domine, levavi animam meam* (Salzburg, 1630), and a range of pieces all published in Venice: there is elaborately florid writing for four solo singers in a Rosary litany (1626), polychoral richness juxtaposing every available ingredient in the psalm *De profundis clamavi ad te, Domine* (1624), and three sinfonias from *Concerti academici*, Op 8 (1615-16) give the full complement of Concerto Scirocco scope to flex their

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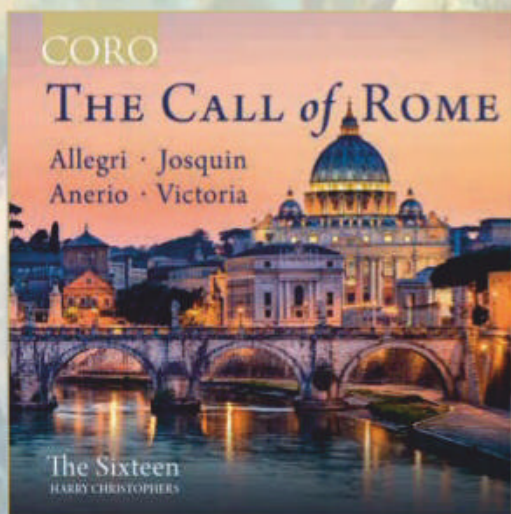
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Mary Bevan | Harry Christophers

The premiere recording of MacMillan's much-anticipated Fifth Symphony and *The Sun Danced* featuring soloist, Mary Bevan. Released Friday 3 April.

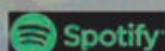
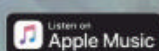
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muscles. As with their groundbreaking album of music by the Venetian Giovanni Croce (Arcana, 2017), the endeavours of these gifted musicians unveil another intriguing composer whose works have hardly made a dent in the discography until now. **David Vickers**

Blackford

Pietà^a. Cantic of Winter

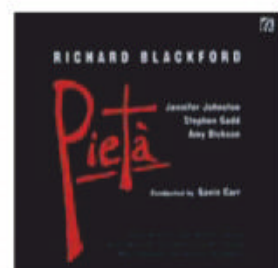
Amy Dickson *sop sax* ^a**Jennifer Johnston** *mez*

^a**Stephen Gadd** *bar* ^a**Bournemouth Symphony**

Youth Chorus and Chorus; Bournemouth

Symphony Orchestra / Gavin Carr

Nimbus Alliance (F) NI6396 (48' • DDD • T/t)



The *Stabat mater* – Mary's grief upon seeing her son crucified on the

Cross – has received more than its fair share of mournful and melancholic music over the years. Richard Blackford takes a very different approach. So different, in fact, that he decided to give the work another name: *Pietà*.

Sparks fly and tempers flame in Blackford's fire-and-brimstone setting. Rage, injustice and righteous indignation strike out against the usual cries of suffering and passive contemplation. In order to place the old Christian hymn within a more modern-day setting, Blackford intersperses the original text with passages taken from the *Requiem* of the Russian poet Anna Akhmatova, whose husband 'disappeared' and son was imprisoned during Stalin's Great Purge of 1936-38.

Blackford states in the booklet notes that Akhmatova's poems fundamentally changed his approach to setting the *Stabat mater* text, and one can see why. His setting captures the raw emotional qualities of Akhmatova's lines. Russian influences also spill over into the music. Shostakovich's sharp rhythms and edgy lines filter through in the *da capo*-style aria 'Pro peccatis suae gentis' (featuring Stephen Gadd's resonant baritone voice), while mezzo Jennifer Johnston imparts dramatic intensity to Akhmatova's 'Weeks fly swiftly by'. The strings of the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra directed by Gavin Carr produce a rich palette of sounds that is often greater than the sum of its parts. But the greatest impact is felt in those cameo moments when Amy Dickson's soprano saxophone cuts through – in the fragile lines of the second movement ('Quis es homo'), or at the end, where its plangent sound suggests that the rage that consumes this passionate work finally gives way to forgiveness. **Pwyll ap Siôn**

L & N Boulanger

'Clairières'

L Boulanger Attente. Clairières dans le ciel.

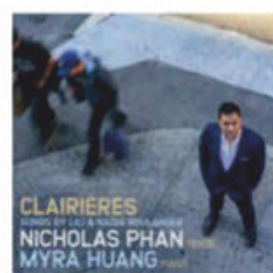
Reflets N Boulanger Cantique. Heures ternes.

La mer est plus belle. Soir d'hiver. Soleils

couchants. Versailles

Nicholas Phan *ten* **Myra Huang** *pf*

Avie (F) AV2414 (53' • DDD • T/t)



Nicholas Phan recently opened a Philadelphia Chamber Music Society recital with

a Nadia Boulanger-authored song I never knew existed, 'Soir d'hiver', with an effect so powerful that I feared I would never again hear this seemingly forgotten miniature epic about a woman waiting for her husband to come home from the First World War. Luckily, that song ends Phan's new recital disc of songs by Lili and Nadia Boulanger, and is one only among many riches.

The music world is long acquainted with Lili Boulanger, whose death from tuberculosis in 1918 at the age of 24 is one of the century's great musical tragedies. But her older sister Nadia (1887-1979) was also a notable composer before becoming the legendary teacher of composers ranging from Aaron Copland to Philip Glass. Juxtaposing the sisters highlights their individual musical identities. The musical godfather here is Debussy, specifically his 1893 *Proses lyriques*, with self-authored texts that allowed the composer to musically roam free, even more than usual. Both Boulangers are represented here by through-composed pieces whose starting points give not the slightest hint of a musical or poetic destination. Like Debussy, they often employ simple, sequential ideas in the piano while allowing the vocal lines to go where the words lead them.

Nadia builds her songs out of discrete modules with well-considered cumulative effects. Lili is more airborne and seamless, with unpredictable weather fronts of emotion that evolve out of and into one another, enabled by a larger palette of harmonic resources. However glistening the music's surfaces, the disc is not an easy listen, with its poetic abstraction and free-ranging music.

In fact, one wonders if the main piece on the disc, the 13-song cycle *Clairières dans le ciel* (1914), owes its lack of visibility partly to its challenges – and the lack of any clear path to the manner in which it should be performed. The Francis Jammes text is written from a male viewpoint, looking back on a passionate but no-longer-existent

relationship with imagery ranging from floral to religious (both customary at that time). Most memories are wistful, though with a few gothic turns, and with an ambitious final song, 'Demain fera un an', which Phan (in his excellent booklet notes) describes as reprising previous musical motifs much in the fashion of Faure's *La bonne chanson*.

Phan's primary precedent is Jean-Paul Fouchécourt's 2007 recording on Timpani, with an articulate but less robust vocal production that navigates the upper registers with particular ease. But is ease what is needed here? Phan's more mainstream tenor voice (he occasionally resembles Peter Pears) uses the upper range to reveal great dramatic tension in the music, with an intensity that can be downright operatic. Pianist Myra Huang matches him all the way, with especially fine effect in 'Parfois, je suis triste' where an out-of-left-field keyboard flourish conveys the protagonist's quickly shifting memories.

Phan has deeply internalised this music – with highly detailed, personal, specific and often quite volatile responses to Lili Boulanger's particular fusion of music and poetry in *Clairières dans le ciel* – though not through the lens of Debussy. Boulanger taken on her own terms. This less genteel approach to French art song has also been explored by François Le Roux; still, Phan is likely to be controversial. But to these American ears, Phan delivers a more emotionally comprehensive (and deeply welcome) vision of this worthy music.

David Patrick Stearns

Clairières dans le ciel – selected comparison:

Fouchécourt, Jacquon (TIMP) 1C1128

Ešenvalds

A Soldier's Mother's Lullaby. Amazing Grace.

Evening. In my little picture frame. Long Road.

My love is like a red, red rose. The New Moon.

Northern Lights. O, she doth teach the torches

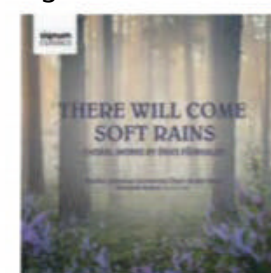
to burn bright. Only in sleep. Rivers of Light.

Spring Rain. Stars. There will come soft rains

The Pacific Lutheran University

Choir of the West / Richard Nance

Signum (F) SIGCD603 (71' • DDD • T/t)



The Latvian composer Ēriks Ešenvalds (b1977) is noted for the wide

range of his compositions, which span opera (*The Immured* of 2016), through the large-scale choral and orchestral (*Passion and Resurrection* of 2005, the *St Luke Passion* and the *Nordic Light* multimedia

symphony), to the more intimate part-songs and shorter choral works featured on this disc. As a singer he writes with a pleasing assurance; there is little here that will scare off the unsuspecting listener.

He is renowned for his imaginative response to nature and folklore. Six of the pieces recorded here set texts by the American lyric poet Sara Teasdale (1884-1933). How evocative they are. In *Spring Rain* Esenvalds perfectly captures its essential homespun melancholy, lifted further by the delightful guitar-duet accompaniment and mid-Atlantic pronunciation.

Although he favours predominantly homophonic textures, Esenvalds manages to achieve sufficient variety through the addition of tuned percussion and solo instruments to sustain interest. The bass flute in *Long Road* lends an especially haunting facet. *Rivers of Light* quotes from two Sámi *yoiks* or folk songs, enhanced by a Jew's harp. The score of *Stars* includes wine glasses and Tibetan singing bowls, though the latter are omitted here. Other attractive highlights include *In my little picture frame* (with its stratospheric wordless soprano obbligato from Ally Atwood) and *Evening* – a glowing, harmonic melting pot.

Despite some overlapping of programme with Trinity College's Esenvalds disc 'Northern Lights' (Hyperion, 3/15), this new release can stand proudly against all rivals. Richard Nance has polished his Pacific Lutheran choristers to perfection. Balance and tuning are beyond reproach, with superb control of a full dynamic range. The soloists' contributions are another great attraction.

The disc closes with a deliciously 'floating', close-harmony arrangement of 'Amazing Grace', inspired by Whitney Houston, no less. **Malcolm Riley**

Fauré

'Fauré et ses poètes'

La papillon et la fleur, Op 1 No 1. Sérénade toscane, Op 3 No 2. La chanson du pêcheur, Op 4 No 1. Three Songs, Op 5 - No 1, Chant d'automne; No 2, Rêve d'amour. Three Songs, Op 6. Three Songs, Op 7 - No 1, Après un rêve; No 3, Barcarolle. Au bord de l'eau, Op 8 No 1. Three Songs, Op 23. Four Songs, Op 39 - No 1, Aurore; No 4, Les roses d'Ispahan. Nocturne, Op 43 No 2. Two Songs, Op 46. Four Songs, Op 51 - No 1, Larmes; No 2, Au cimetière; No 4, La rose. Cinq Mélodies de Venise, Op 58 - No 1, Mandoline; No 2, En sourdine. Soir, Op 83 No 2. Three Songs, Op 85. Le Don silencieux, Op 92. Chanson, Op 94. Sérénade du Bourgeois gentilhomme, Op *posth*

Marc Mauillon bar **Anne Le Bozec** pf

Harmonia Mundi © HMM90 2636 (73) • DDD • T



The French baritone Marc Mauillon progresses from one musical time warp to

another here. He is a distinctive presence in the early music community, having sung with Le Poeme Harmonique and Les Arts Florissants, been featured in more than a few French Baroque operas and, as a solo artist on Harmonia Mundi, recorded Lambert's *Leçons de Ténèbres* – always a palpable vocal presence whether in an ensemble or as a soloist. Fauré feels like a perfectly natural step – and in a manner that recalls mid-20th-century Fauré recordings. Mauillon's non-stentorian, slightly nasal sound inhabits the netherworld between tenor and baritone, and recalls the still-touchstone recordings of Camille Maurane (on the Eloquence label's 'The Art of Camille Maurane', though better heard on Erato-label Fauré recordings that appear to be out of circulation).

Whether this is a voice you want to hear over a 73-minute recital is another story. Amid the internationalisation of the 1960s and '70s, Gérard Souzay led the way towards a weightier, more resonant sound, even in early music, and that shift wasn't always an improvement. As happy as I am to hear the Maurane/Mauillon tone quality here, some listeners, however, may find it strange – but still interpretatively satisfying. Mauillon's sound doesn't just serve the words; the sound *is* the words. With that comes an ease of expression not consistently present in Mauillon's sometimes-reticent performances on his 2014 collection of First World War songs 'Melodies – Prescience Conscience' (Editions Hortus).

In addition, he and pianist Anne Le Bozec know how to build the tension: though Fauré's rippling piano-writing can lapse into soothing sameness (no wonder the composer chose so much verse with references to the sea), Le Bozec finds exceptional expressive significance in the most fluid key-changes. Like Maurane at his best, Mauillon knows how to maintain a sense of intimacy with the listener. External heat is not applied; Mauillon assumes the words have their own power and need less help from him.

After all, the thoughtful programme is poet-based. The songs are roughly in chronological order, highlighting Fauré's growing response to the poets of his choosing, starting with the breezy, uncomplicated 'Le papillon et la fleur',

written when the composer was a teenager, and progressing on to a distinctive, Zen-like abstraction. Avoiding the famous song-cycles (which contain Fauré's most original music), Mauillon fills out the disc with unusual items such as the posthumous 'Sérénade du Bourgeois gentilhomme' from an unperformed incidental score to the Molière play. Fauré is still Fauré here, aside from a climactic vocalisation almost worthy of Offenbach. The more widely heard Paul Verlaine-based songs 'Mandoline' and 'En sourdine' are as charming and intelligent as any on disc. Ending the album with the 'Chanson', Op 94 – low-key even by Fauré's standards – is the one mis-step here, and not a big one. **David Patrick Stearns**

Jančevskis

Aeternum. Ar zvaigžņu kluso gaismu (Silent Starlight). Atsalums (Coldness). The Button. Mater amabilis. Odplīv (Ebb Tide). O lux beata Trinitas. When

The Mixed Choir of Riga Cathedral Choir School / Jurgis Cābulis

Hyperion © CDA68328 (57) • DDD • T/t



Jēkabs Jančevskis (b1992) personifies the next generation of Latvian choral

composers after Ēriks Esenvalds, his teacher. On the evidence of this recording, he has found subtle and authentic ways of furthering the distinctive sound of Latvian choral music established in the last century.

That sound is inextricably linked to a national singing style – chamber choirs slightly larger than we're used to in the West, with the same level of discipline, tonal strength and purity but a softer edge and a delivery that tends to be lined with vulnerability and emotional ferocity. It's no accident that The Mixed Choir of Riga Cathedral Choir School demonstrates those qualities – together with apparently huge reserves of latent power – and that the music of this, one of its alumni, does too (conductor Jurgis Cābulis shared a class with the composer).

Much of the music here deals with personal and national pain in the Baltic tradition. *Ar zvaigžņu kluso gaismu* ('Silent Starlight') commemorates the 52 killed when a supermarket roof collapsed in Riga in 2013, a memorial slab in music that becomes a repeating chant, linked by the sounds of the *kokle* – a Baltic psaltery associated with funerals. *Aeternum* salutes Latvian independence but includes a cry



Bright, invigorating performances: St John's Voices and Graham Walker bring the rhythmic vitality of William Mathias's music to life

of pain before it drifts into 'the eternal' with a remarkable image of infinite space. Distance is also captured in the separate choirs of *When*, using Juliet's words from Shakespeare, another highlight.

Often Jančevskis includes subtle additions that are not overindulged: microtonality, whistling, whispering, supplementary instruments, unusual vocal techniques referencing animal life or vernacular traditions (though the last work, *The Button*, is weakened for throwing too much of everything at the wall). That restraint mostly extends to the material and its treatment; all the breath-sounds of *Odphw* dredge up is one big harmonic gesture, and it's enough.

Few more beautiful realisations of Latvia's choral language have come my way in the past decade but the music treads a treacherous line between the searching and the passé, crossing it once or twice, and the radio studio sound (why not the cathedral?) sometimes suggests a little trickery. I'm tempted to conclude that, at his best, Jančevskis mines more successfully into the base material of that language – thickened harmonies that glance east to Russia, parallel harmonies that look north to Estonia, deeply expressive arioso-style

melody rooted in Latvia's opera tradition – than his teacher. One wonders where that Latvian sound can go and what events will shape it. There's plenty of time for Jančevskis, still in his twenties, to think on that. **Andrew Mellor**

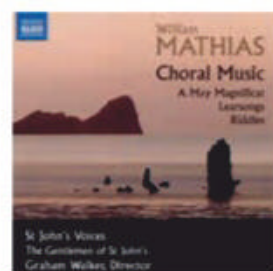
Mathias

Ave verum corpus. A Babe is Born, Op 55. Jesus College Canticles, Op 53. Learsongs. A May Magnificat, Op 79 No 2. Y nefoedd sydd yn datgan gogoniant Duw (The heavens declare the glory of god). Riddles^a

St John's Voices; ^aThe Gentlemen of St John's / Graham Walker

Naxos ® 8 574162 (72' • DDD)

Texts and translations available from naxos.com



One thing you find in all William Mathias's music is a powerful, infectious and unstoppable rhythmic vigour. Even in more reflective vein, as with the gently swaying *Ave verum corpus* completed shortly before his death in 1992, Mathias seems to have an obsessive desire to maintain a driving momentum, which

serves to give everything great life-enhancing energy. This is the most notable characteristic of these bright, invigorating performances from Graham Walker and St John's Voices, the sister choir to the long-established Chapel Choir at St John's College, Cambridge.

The personal connection St John's College had with Mathias during the tenure of George Guest as director of music is celebrated here with a powerful and dramatically infused performance of a Welsh translation of verses from Psalm 19 (*Y nefoedd sydd* – 'The heavens declare'), while a further Cambridge connection comes with an enthusiastic – sometimes, possibly, a little over-enthusiastic – performance of the evening canticles Mathias wrote in 1970 for Jesus College. The first of these is worked out rather more generously in the ecstatic *A May Magnificat*.

Nowhere is Mathias's rhythmic vitality more exuberantly conveyed by these singers than in the five settings for female voices and piano duet (vivaciously played by Glen Dempsey and Aïda Lahlou) of poems by Edward Lear. Their tautness of ensemble, superb precision of pitch and extraordinary clarity of diction

combine to make this performance of the previously un-recorded *Lear* songs of 1988 a matchless and hugely entertaining display of dazzling choral singing.

Also recorded for the first time is *Riddles*, a clever, light-hearted set of musical riddles based on Anglo-Saxon texts. Here St John's Voices are joined by the Gentlemen of St John's and the ensuing thickening of the choral sound, as well as the frequent emergence of various solo voices, provides a rich and at times uncharacteristically luxuriant texture. Mathias's infectious musical humour is never far beneath the surface and everything is shot through with unstoppable, dancing rhythms.

A highly impressive debut disc which captures the essence of Mathias's joyous musical personality. **Marc Rochester**

Parry

Judith, or The Regeneration of Manasseh

Sarah Fox *sop* **Kathryn Rudge** *mez*

Toby Spence *ten* **Henry Waddington** *bass-bar*

Crouch End Festival Chorus; London Mozart

Players / William Vann

Chandos ⑤ ② CHSA5268 (131' • DDD/DSD • T)



Hands up: how many of us have laughed at Ernest Newman's quip about Parry 'sickening

for another oratorio' without ever having heard one of Parry's full-length choral works from beginning to end? If we're honest, the correlation must be close to 100 per cent. Parry's *Judith* – the hit of the 1888 Birmingham Triennial Festival – went completely unperformed in the UK between 1951 and 2019. Incredibly, for a work that was once so admired, there has never been a full-length recording. This magnificent account from Chandos, featuring the team that gave that 2019 performance, fills one of the most significant gaps in the discography of British music and brings us closer to a full artistic picture of the composer whom Elgar called 'the head of our art in this country'.

Parry conceived *Judith* as a drama as much as an oratorio, and over two expansive acts it retells a particularly blood-and-thunderous slice of Old Testament history, covering the Israelites' worship of the child-devouring Moloch, the fall of Jerusalem and Judith's decapitation of the Assyrian general Holofernes (which Parry, mindful of Victorian sensibilities, keeps firmly offstage). Choruses stand like monuments. Parry's muscular fugal build-ups come straight out of Handel by way of

Mendelssohn's *Elijah*, and the orchestration delivers some striking touches of colour, with shimmering gongs at particularly barbaric moments.

In between, Parry weaves yard upon yard of golden, lyrical music, glowing with clarinets and horns, and it's in this vein that he strikes upon the score's noblest melodic inspiration, the ballad 'Long since in Egypt's plenteous land', whose melody later became the hymn tune *Repton*, and which in a fairer universe should have guaranteed *Judith*'s immortality. After hearing it sung with radiant tenderness by Kathryn Rudge, with Parry's gentle, nostalgic orchestral ritornellos framing each verse, you'll never take it for granted again.

Every aspect of this performance sounds like a labour of love. Toby Spence is passionate and heroic as King Manasseh, and Sarah Fox brings a thrilling brilliance to the (surprisingly small) title-role. But Rudge's soaring, expressive singing as Meshullemeth gives the piece its real heart, and she's accompanied with intense sympathy by the conductor William Vann, who avoids any suggestion of bombast or sentimentality, and builds Parry's great paragraphs so eloquently and with such assurance that you'd think he'd been conducting this music all his life. The children's choir are delightful and Crouch End Festival Chorus are thoroughly on form: ringing, confident and only very occasionally sounding slightly congested in the acoustic of St Jude-on-the-Hill, Hampstead.

Ultimately, though, any one critical verdict is beside the point. This is a landmark recording. *Judith* is no masterpiece: Parry's innate good taste keeps intervening, and the scene in which the Assyrian hordes slaughter the Hebrews is about as savage as Choral Evensong. But hearing it complete merely reaffirms the truth that to listen to Elgar without knowing Parry is like hearing Brahms without knowing Schumann. I can imagine more dramatic performances; but if we get them, it will be because this recording showed the way. **Richard Bratby**

Schumann

Szenen aus Goethes Faust, WoO3

Elsa Dreisig *sop* **Roman Trekel** *bar* **René Pape** *bass*

Berlin State Opera Chorus; Staatskapelle Berlin / Daniel Barenboim

Stage director **Jürgen Flimm**

Video director **Michael Beyer**

ArtHaus Musik ⑤ ② DVD 109 418; ⑤ 109 419 (148' • NTSC • 16:9 • 1080i • DTS-HS MA5.0, DTS5.0 & PCM stereo • O • s)

Recorded live, October 3, 2017



Music for the Faust drama? Goethe always proposed Mozart, albeit posthumously, but Schumann – despite nerves about composing music for what he called 'one of the seminal and most widely acclaimed works in German literature' – put himself up there alongside other front runners Berlioz, Liszt and Wagner. Like them he intended to concentrate on individual scenes and themes, avoiding the whole work and (like Berlioz) hinting at, rather than actually calling for, a dramatic staging.

Over almost a decade Schumann compiled his 'oratorio' (his description) in three parts, the end of the play first, the Overture last – intriguingly much like Wagner's parallel and almost contemporary method with the *Ring* cycle. For more details see *Gramophone's* reviews of previous major recordings: the epoch-making first (led and organised by Benjamin Britten – Decca, 12/73), then Klee and Abbado (respectively EMI/Warner and Sony, 5/95), and Harding (BR-Klassik, 12/14). The present new issue is different in presenting the work – at a gala to mark the reopening of the Berlin Staatsoper in October 2017 – as a stage production which interpolates (extra) spoken drama from Goethe's play in between each of the nine main scenes Schumann set to music.

The immediate problem here is that, as with many of today's interventions into 19th-century music drama (cf *Fidelio*, *Der Freischütz*), the composer's sense and choice of timing are completely thrown out. It becomes a rewrite rather than an interpretation. Schumann's selection of Faust scenes is challengingly wide – no reduction to a Gounod number opera here, more a philosophical collection which, seducing Gretchen in Part 1 aside, concentrates on Faust's soul, his blinding, death and salvation.

A hard job for stage director Jürgen Flimm, whose dressed-up 19th-century Grand Opera style of 'if the text mentions it, show it' suits Part 1 best. But the production loses out later when the attempt to costume Goethe's spirit and less realistic characters like the 'Lemurs' steers dangerously close to pantomime. And the introduction of modern clothes in Part 3 looks just lazily trendy: why are there emergency workers dressed as they are now in this Paradise?

OK, there is certainly some dramatic tension – and relevance to the play – in



Pioneering Parry: William Vann directs assembled forces including the Crouch End Chorus and London Mozart Players in a welcome resurrection of the oratorio *Judith*

playing the two Fausts (actor/singer) at differing young/old ages and placing them on stage together most of the time. Yet the Mephistopheles and Gretchen actor doubles (the latter, Meike Droste, outstanding) are often reduced to merely decorating the space. And a bit too much obscure use is made of the stage within the stage, its artificial painted wallpaper hangings in Part 2 (sculptor Markus Lüpertz is the set designer) and the carried-on rows of old theatre seating. In all this mesh of detail and movement the chorus – great singing, especially from the children – does little apart from process on and stand and deliver. A good focus for Schumann's sometimes intentionally naive but concentration-demanding part-writing, less for drama.

Musically there is much well-rounded singing from the main trio of Dreisig, Pape and Trekel, even though their impact on the show is undoubtedly lessened by the presence and work of the actors. Barenboim and his orchestra bring predictable bite and colour to the proceedings, although I wish they'd been balanced symphonically a bit more forwards. They need that to carry us through spoken passages which, placed in a context they were never meant for, can drag. For Schumann's own cunning pacing

of the piece see especially the 'work-as-writ' music-only versions of Harding or the slower but loving and so carefully achieved detail of Britten. It's hard to recommend this DVD as a fulfilling performance event in itself but it does indeed serve as a useful information-gatherer on both the play and Schumann's challenging approach to it.

Mike Ashman

Tomkins

'O Give Thanks Unto the Lord'

Death is swallowed up in victory. A Fantasy. The Fourth Service. Give ear unto my words. Give sentence with me, O God. Gloria tibi Trinitas. The heavens declare the glory of God. Jesus came when the doors were shut. O give thanks unto the Lord. O Lord, how manifold are thy works. Preces and Responses. Remember me, O Lord. The Seventh Service. Turn unto the Lord our God. Voluntary. Who can tell how oft he offendeth

The Choir of HM Chapel Royal, Hampton Court Palace / Carl Jackson with Rufus Frowde org
Resonus © RES10253 (74' • DDD • T)



Along with Tallis, Byrd and Gibbons (and, later, Purcell), Thomas Tomkins was

a member of the Chapel Royal – the peripatetic ensemble of singers, organists and composers who followed English monarchs from palace to palace, providing music for royal worship. Today each palace has its own choir, and it seems only fitting that one of these – the Choir of the Chapel Royal, Hampton Court – should step up to celebrate a composer rarely in the choral spotlight.

The selection of works (including two recorded premieres, the verse anthem *Death is swallowed up in victory* and the *Magnificat* and *Nunc dimittis* of the Seventh Service) seems designed to take the road less travelled and throws up plenty of interest. The opener *Death is swallowed up* flickers with duelling treble soloists, whose dotted rhythms here crackle and spark with energy; the psalm-setting *Give ear unto my words* manipulates its four-part texture to careful effect; while a *Gloria tibi Trinitas* for solo organ finds the two hands chasing one another up and down the organ in an extended game of cat and mouse.

The quality of the treble-singing under music director Carl Jackson is superb, offering a more focused, crisper alternative to blowsier rival recordings from New College and Magdalen, Oxford (although the latter's collaboration with Fretwork lends accompaniments some welcome

textural grit in contrast to the glassy smoothness of Hampton Court's chamber organ). Men's voices are more mixed.

Less madrigalian in his style than Weelkes or Gibbons, Tomkins's weaker rhetorical instinct is underlined here by the variety of texts, whose vivid contrasts draw remarkably consistent responses from the composer. Perhaps a disc, then, to dip into for individual works rather than a recital to take at a gulp. **Alexandra Coghlan**

'The Contrast'

'English Poetry in Song'

Bridge Adoration. Come to me in my dreams. Go not, happy day. Love went a-riding. Mantle of Blue. When most I wink. When you are old
Quilter Arab Love Song. Autumn Evening. By a Fountainside. Dream Valley. Fair house of Joy. My Life's Delight **Vaughan Williams** Orpheus with his lute. Silent Noon. The sky above the roof
Walton Three Façade Settings. A Song for the Lord Mayor's Table **Watkins** Five Larkin Songs
Carolyn Sampson *sop* **Joseph Middleton** *pf*
BIS © BIS2413 (81' • DDD/DSD • T)



Carolyn Sampson and Joseph Middleton's new album takes its name from the

penultimate song of Walton's *A Song for the Lord Mayor's Table*, with its pointed, witty depiction of the contrast between life in London and life in the country. Its centrepiece, however, indeed the fulcrum round which the programme effectively swings, is the first recording of Huw Watkins's *Five Larkin Songs*, of which Sampson gave the premiere in 2010. It's a striking cycle in several ways.

Watkins probes the dark ironies and pessimism of Larkin's verse with considerable insight, as hovering vocal lines and sparse piano figurations broaden towards lyricism in moments of nostalgia or crisis before fragmenting into disillusionment. The structure is admirably taut: the long central 'Love Songs in Age', in which music itself is equated with past emotional failures, is flanked by two bitter scherzos about solitude and money, framed in turn by reflections on desire turning sour and the terrible nature of lovelessness. It's unnerving stuff, though it suits Sampson down to the ground. She phrases beautifully, floats high *pianissimos* with exceptional ease, and is always subtle in her approach to the text, though there are also some startling moments of declamatory ferocity that throw us off balance. Middleton similarly impresses, playing with reined-in intensity and superb dynamic control.

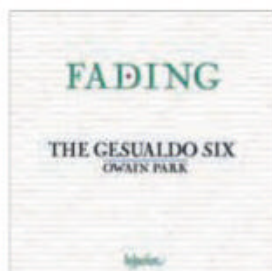
The rest of the recital is carefully structured in order to throw the cycle's themes into relief. Larkin's emphasis on nostalgia and solitude is echoed in songs about the mutability of love by Frank Bridge, in which 'When you are old and grey' forms a striking counterpart to Watkins's 'Love Songs in Age'. Quilter's 'Dream Valley' and 'By a Fountainside' equate music with memory and loss respectively, while Vaughan Williams, poles apart from Larkin in mood, contentedly celebrates desire in 'Silent Noon' and evokes music's powers to console and heal in 'Orpheus with his lute'. Larkin's disquieting view of mundanity, meanwhile, contrasts sharply with Walton's depiction of the jostling vitality of London and the urbanity of his 1932 *Façade* songs, reworked for singer and piano from the 1923 original for actors and instrumentalists.

Sampson and Middleton perform this repertory wonderfully well. There's a real tenderness in the central songs of Walton's *Lord Mayor's Table* that offsets the panache of the rest of the cycle, and the *Façade Settings* are delightful in their sly wit and grace. The Bridge songs are deeply felt: 'Adoration' builds to a rapt, ecstatic climax; 'Mantle of Blue' touches with its simple directness; and the energy of 'Love went a-riding' is exhilarating. The Vaughan Williams group is particularly ravishing. Middleton's playing here is all understated refinement, while Sampson allows the long lines to flow with exquisite poise, all the while keeping us constantly aware of the shifts of meaning in the texts and the depth of emotion that lies behind them: a beautiful performance, and arguably the high point of a very fine recital indeed.

Tim Ashley

'Fading'

Blok-Wilson O little rose, O dark rose **Byrd** Lullaby 'My sweet little baby' **Gesualdo** Illumina faciem tuam **Gombert** Media vita **Hildegard** O Ecclesia **Lobo** Versa est in luctum **Marenzio** Potrò viver io più se senza luce **Marsh** Arabesques - No 3, Fading; No 4, Seeds in flight **Park** Phos hilaron **Rimkus** My heart is like a singing bird **Seers** Look down, O Lord **Tallis** Te lucis ante terminum I **Tormis** Four Estonian Lullabies **Tye** Ad te clamamus 'Salve regina'
The Gesualdo Six / Owain Park
Hyperion © CDA68285 (64' • DDD • T/t)



Ingeniously programmed and impeccably delivered, with that undefinable

excitement that comes from a group of musicians working absolutely as one, The Gesualdo Six's 'Fading' is startlingly, urgently excellent. If their first album ('English Motets', 4/18) pricked up the ears and their second ('Christmas', 12/19) confirmed their talent, this third recording from the young, all-male vocal ensemble feels like an arrival, showing us exactly what this group is capable of.

'Fading' is an album of dusk and dawn, autumn and spring – music from the cusp, caught between light and dark, innocence and experience. What opens with candlelit music for Compline, fading to black, closes outdoors in the stirrings of rebirth and rich new beginnings. The now ubiquitous combination of Renaissance and contemporary works is carefully handled, with plenty of new and unfamiliar names – Sarah Rimkus, Gerda Blok-Wilson, Jonathan Seers – in the mix as well as unexpected choices from Gesualdo and Marenzio alongside classics by Tallis, Lobo and Gombert.

Music director Owain Park has built his sequence thoughtfully, and much of the joy here comes from the conversations between works: the melting resolution from Joanna Marsh's 'Fading' into the sober certainty of Byrd's 'My sweet little baby' (the lullaby's unusually low key giving it a caressing warmth and pillowy depth thanks to the group's fine basses), the fragile legato lines of Hildegard of Bingen's *O Ecclesia* shattering into the echoing melodic fragments that open Rimkus's *My heart is like a singing bird*, the way Tormis's aphoristic little *Estonian Lullabies* energise and reset the ear before the longer polyphonic pieces.

The quality of the singing – the blend and bass-anchored balance, the rounded, unforced tone, the control from solo voices – is exhilarating. But what's even more exciting is what we don't hear. These aren't performances that call attention to themselves. The polyphonic instinct to listen and pass focus between the voices runs right through the repertoire, which breathes with instinctive momentum, natural rather than enforced expression, finding spaces within the music rather than bending it into statements.

If you think you don't need another account of Gombert's mighty *Media vita* or Lobo's *Versa est in luctum*, have heard enough performances of Tallis's *Te lucis ante terminum* or simply don't have space for yet another young English choral group on your shelves, then think again. The Gesualdo Six are the real deal. Far from fading, they're just coming into focus.

Alexandra Coghlan

GRAMOPHONE *talks to ...**Carolyn Sampson*

The soprano discusses her latest album of English song, 'The Contrast', another collaboration with the pianist Joseph Middleton

How did you compile this programme?

As often happens when Joseph and I come up with our recitals, one particular song – or group of songs – will spark the idea. In the case of 'The Contrast', it was Walton's settings of Edith Sitwell's *Façade* texts. We'd performed them a few times in various concert programmes and enjoyed them hugely. That led us to start working on his *Songs for the Lord Mayor's Table*. Then our thoughts about how distinctive his sound world is led us to conceive a programme that explored various voices of English song.

Presumably you have to identify with the poetry at least as much as with the music – is this a challenge when the poetry is less distinguished?

When performing, the first thing I'm interested in is the text. I aim to tell the story and communicate atmosphere and feeling as much as I can, and I assume that that was also the composer's starting point. So the music serves the poetry. Should the poetry be somewhat trite or mundane, I try to remove my own prejudice and keep things fairly simple ... and allow the music to speak for itself.

Do you find it easier to memorise songs in English?

As a general rule, I do find it easier to absorb texts in English, simply because there is no barrier of understanding to overcome in one's native language. Although I freely admit that it took me a few goes to get my head around Shakespeare's 'When most I wink! Our challenge when singing in a foreign language is to try to get to the stage where we feel native, even if it is just for that particular song. Memorising comes more naturally to me if I fully understand the story and can inhabit the character.

Huw Watkins's *Five Larkin Songs* were written for you – are there ways in which this is music that especially fits your voice? And did you have any input in the process?

It's a wonderful privilege to have had music written for me, especially by someone as gifted as Huw. He chose the poems by Larkin, which was interesting for me; as a fairly sunny

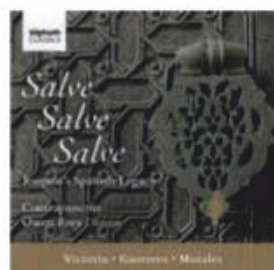


and optimistic person, I wouldn't necessarily have come to those edgy and rather acerbic texts by myself! So it feels as though I have a different voice when I sing them. When Huw had more or less completed them, I went to sing through them with him, so that we could both have a sense of how they fitted me. As I recall, there wasn't much that needed adjusting. His music fits the words so well that any vocal challenges, such as big leaps, are perfectly negotiable.

'Salve, salve, salve'

'Josquin's Spanish Legacy'

Guerrero Ave virgo sanctissima. Surge propera, amica mea **Josquin** Salve regina **Morales** Jubilate Deo omnis terra **Victoria** Missa Gaudeamus. Salve regina **Contrapunctus / Owen Rees** Signum © SIGCD608 (71' • DDD • T/t)



All roads lead to Josquin, even those routed through the Iberian peninsula.

This superb new recording from Owen Rees and Contrapunctus charts a key way in which Josquin's influence continued to mushroom after his own prolific career by exploring ostinato technique – the repeated use of a musical motto as binding agent in the polyphonic texture – through motets by Morales (c1500-1553) and

Guerrero (1528-99) alongside the broad and statuesque *Missa Gaudeamus* of Victoria (1548-1611).

The *Gaudeamus* thread begins with Morales's *Jubilate Deo omnis terra*, which contains a six-note motto from the *Gaudeamus* plainchant. Contrapunctus typically tend towards an overall bright, light style with a prominent and expressive alto core which can be both searing and thrilling at points of heightened emotion. In the Spanish repertoire their sound is fuller and a little warmer than on previous releases – indeed, with such a thrilling focus from countertenors Rory McCleery and Matthew Venner that this ensemble mirrors the vocal balance found on early discs by The Sixteen. The tenors, too, enjoy expressive moments in the spotlight, particularly in Morales's motet, where the rising and repeating motto is theirs. This same rising motto is found in the top voices of Victoria's *Missa Gaudeamus*,

an elongated, arching phrase which Rees links to Josquin's language. More polished in this performance but slightly more reserved than the Lay Clerks of Westminster Cathedral under Matthew Martin (Hyperion, 9/09), the smouldering slow-burn approach of Contrapunctus continues to pay dividends throughout this Mass. What is lost from the Westminster Cathedral performance in terms of vocal heft and sheer thrilling energetic uplift is gained in finesse and brilliant sheen.

Guerrero's exquisite *Ave virgo sanctissima* flows with throbbing beauty but ultimately this impassioned motet requires a larger ensemble to create the sheer thrilling sound required at 'Salve semper gloriosa'. Both Westminster Cathedral under David Hill (Hyperion, 11/85, 3/87) and the Monteverdi Choir under John Eliot Gardiner (SDG, 6/05) find a richer beauty in slower tempos and larger forces.

Edward Breen

WHAT NEXT?

Do you have a favourite piece of music and want to explore further? Our monthly feature suggests some musical journeys that venture beyond the most familiar works, with some recommended versions. This month, **Andrew Farach-Colton**'s point of departure is ...

Barber's *Adagio for Strings* (1936)

Barber wrote to a friend in September 1936: 'I have just completed the slow movement of my quartet today – it is a knockout!' He never said much more about what would become his greatest hit, but then this achingly elegiac movement speaks most eloquently for itself. Arturo Toscanini conducted the premiere of the composer's string orchestra arrangement in November 1938 on a US national radio broadcast, and from there the *Adagio for Strings* took on a life of its own. When Franklin D Roosevelt died in 1945, radio stations across the US turned to the work as an apt musical expression of public grief. It's been played at memorials for John F Kennedy, Princess Diana and those who died on September 11, and prominently featured in films such as *The Elephant Man* (1980) and *Platoon* (1986). Manfred Honeck's luminous, consolatory performance seems to unfold in a single breath.

● **Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra / Manfred Honeck**
(Reference Recordings, 2/18)

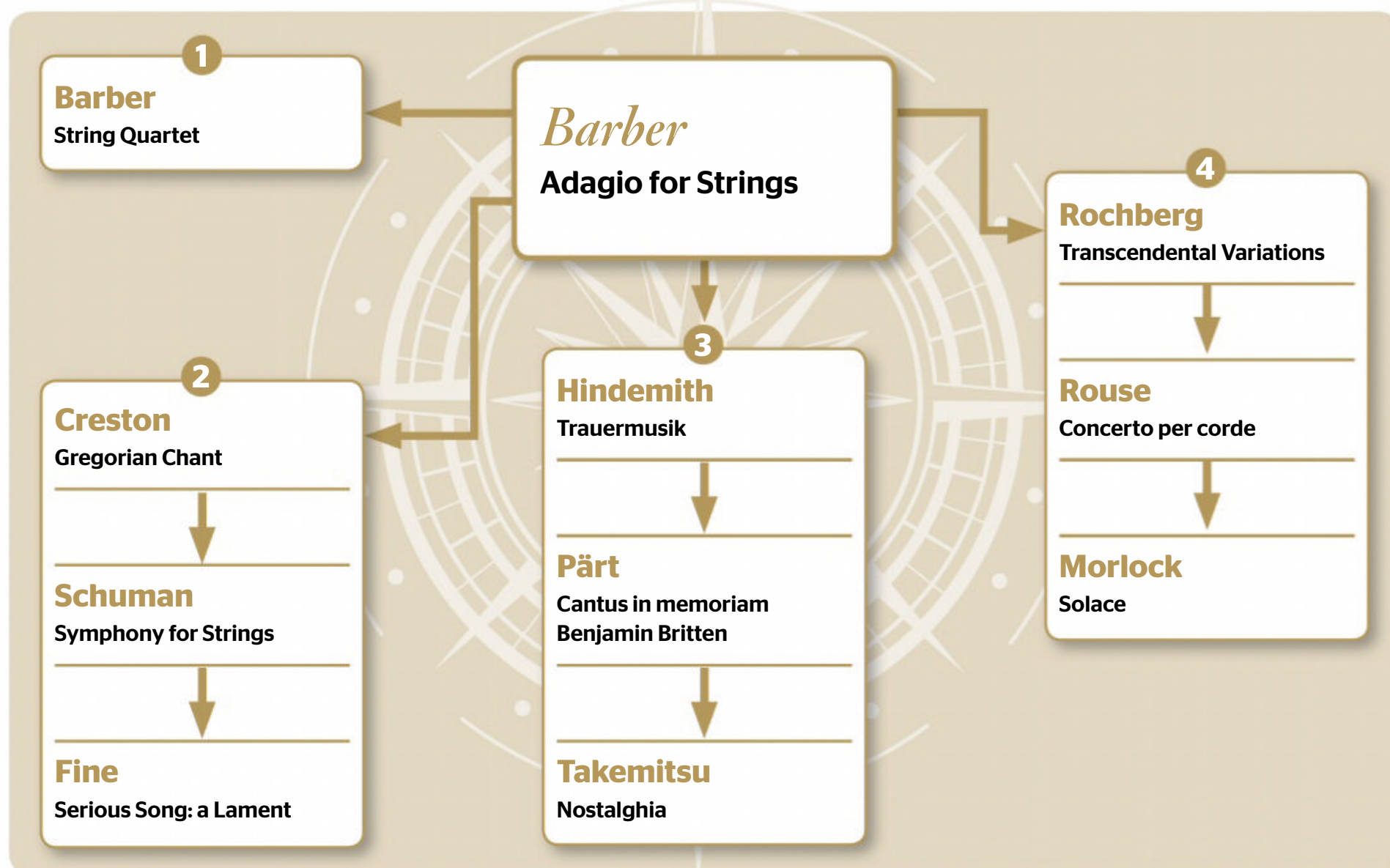
1 *Origin story*

Barber String Quartet (1936) Few would argue that the tempestuous, emotionally unsettled outer movements of Barber's Op 11 String Quartet are as inspired (or inspirational) as the central *Molto adagio*. Still, hearing the music in its original context is illuminating, particularly as the intimate sound of four lone strings reveals a fragility in the music that can be partially obscured in the orchestral arrangement.

● **Endellion Quartet** (Warner Classics, 10/94)

2 *American cousins*

Creston Gregorian Chant (1936) Paul Creston composed a string quartet in the same year as Barber, and similarly adapted its slow movement into a work for string orchestra. With its modal harmonies and subtle colouration – inspired, perhaps, by Vaughan Williams's *Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis* –





Barber's elegiac *Adagio* has aptly been used at funerals and in movies like Oliver Stone's *Platoon* (1986)

this is a lovely example of Creston's craftsmanship and an excellent place to begin an exploration of this undervalued American composer's music.

● New York Chamber Orchestra / Arthur Lief (Vanguard Classics)

Schuman Symphony for Strings (1943) William Schuman, an exact contemporary of Barber (born in the same year), was a master of traditional forms as well as an important figure in American musical life, serving as president of the Juilliard School and later of New York City's Lincoln Center. This, his fifth symphony, scored for string orchestra, stands alongside his *Symphony No 3* as one of his seminal works. Its vigorous outer movements encase an expansive, searching and hauntingly atmospheric *Larghissimo*.

● Seattle Symphony / Gerard Schwarz (Naxos, 7/93)

Fine Serious Song: a Lament (1955) Had he lived beyond 47, Irving Fine – a graduate of Harvard University and student of Walter Piston, Nadia Boulanger and Serge Koussevitzky – surely would have had a more prominent place in the pantheon of American composers. The entirety of his small output is beautifully wrought. In *Serious Song: a Lament* for string orchestra (perhaps his most unashamedly romantic work), ardent longing is tinged with a sense of urgency.

● Metamorphosen / Scott Yoo (Albany)

3 Mourning Music

Hindemith Trauermusik (1936) Hindemith was en route to London to perform on the viola when he received word of the death of King George V. He composed this four-movement memorial in an afternoon. Although the work is concise (approximately the same length as Barber's *Adagio*, in fact), Hindemith takes the listener through a range of emotional responses to unexpected loss, and does so entirely in greyscale,

like an artist drawing with pencil and charcoal.

● Kim Kashkashian *va* Stuttgart Chamber Orchestra / Dennis Russell Davies (ECM, 11/93)

Pärt Cantus in memoriam Benjamin Britten (1977) 'Simplify, simplify', implored Thoreau – and that's just what Arvo Pärt appears to have done here.

An unadorned minor scale is played as a canon of telescoping durations by a string orchestra accompanied by the ringing of a lone bell. Yet what vivid imagery this 'simplicity' conjures: movement and stasis, light and shadow, the passage of time, perhaps even a vision life and death itself, all seemingly written as if on the head of a pin.

● La Pietà / Angèle Dubeau (Analekta, A/10)

Takemitsu Nostalgia (1987) It's no wonder that Takemitsu – a master of pared-down, slow-moving music – admired the films of Andrei Tarkovsky. This elegy for solo violin and strings, composed in tribute following the film-maker's death, takes a rather uneasy view of reminiscence. Melodic figures flicker and fade, sweet harmonies often turn acrid, and it's difficult to detect even a hint of solace. Takemitsu's vision in *Nostalgia* is bleak, certainly, yet with its glistening textures the work is also ravishing.

● Daniel Hope *vn* Basel Chamber Orchestra (DG)

4 American offspring

Rochberg Transcendental Variations (1975) George Rochberg's wholehearted embrace of tonality in his *Third String Quartet* (1972) caused a scandal at a time when serialism reigned, although in fact the work draws on a shockingly broad range of styles. Despite this diversity, the quartet not only coheres but is a work of considerable emotional weight. Its centre of gravity – and the quartet's beating and beatific heart – is the set of variations, here in the composer's subsequent arrangement for string orchestra.

● Saarbrücken Radio Symphony Orchestra / Christopher Lyndon-Gee (Naxos, 10/03)

Rouse Concerto per corde (1990) The late Christopher Rouse adapted the entirety of his *Second String Quartet* into this concerto for string orchestra. Unlike Barber's *Quartet*, where the *Adagio* is at the centre, Rouse has two slow movements framing a slashing *Allegro molto*. It's a work of dark and bitter desolation until the final minutes, where sunlight very suddenly breaks through the heavy clouds – hardly a novel twist, but a potently transformative one nonetheless, thanks to Rouse's emotional sincerity.

● Concordia Orchestra / Marin Alsop (Phoenix, 12/00)

Morlock Solace (2001, rev 2005) Three sets of string ensembles come together in Jocelyn Morlock's *Solace*: a sextet playing music derived from Josquin's *Missa L'homme armé*; a group of ethereal, high-lying violins; and a solo violin and cello who flutter around the others in ecstatic, avian song. Nothing particularly eventful occurs in its 11 minutes, and in any case that doesn't seem to be the point. Despite its reference to birdsong, *Solace* is not so much a nature portrait (à la *The Lark Ascending*) as it is a rapt, Blakean vision of intensely felt spiritual quietude.

● Mark Fewer *vn* Zoltán Rozsnyai *vc* Vancouver Symphony Orchestra / Bramwell Tovey (Centrediscs)

Available to stream at Apple Music

Opera



Tim Ashley on an overdue revival of Ferdinand Paer's Agnese:

'The score pivots back to Mozart and forwards to Rossini, but we're also aware of Paer's original voice' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 111**



Hugo Shirley welcomes a debut album from tenor Petr Nekoranec:

'What is immediately striking is Nekoranec's light, easy timbre – there's nothing effortful or forced' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 115**

Donizetti

Enrico di Borgogna

Anna Bonitatibus *mez* Enrico
Sonia Ganassi *mez* Elisa
Levy Sekgapane *ten* Guido
Francesco Castoro *ten* Pietro
Luca Tittoto *bass* Gilberto
Lorenzo Barbieri *bass-bar* Brunone
Federica Vitali *sop* Geltrude
Matteo Mezzaro *ten* Nicola

Coro Donizetti Opera; Academia Montis Regalis /

Alessandro De Marchi

Stage director **Silvia Paoli**

Video directors **Adriano Figari, Matteo Ricchetti**

Dynamic (F) DVD 37833; (F) Blu-ray 57833

(160' • NTSC • 16:9 • 1080i • DTS-HD MA5.1,

DD5.1 & PCM stereo • 0 • s)

Recorded live at the Teatro Sociale, Bergamo,

November 23 & 25, December 1, 2018

Includes synopsis



When a director turns an *opera eroica* into a meta-theatrical farce, one has to question whether she happens to believe in the work

itself. Reading the plot of Donizetti's *Enrico di Borgogna*, I share some sympathy for Silvia Paoli. It's standard *bel canto* fare. Young Enrico, raised as a shepherd, discovers he is the heir to a kingdom. His father was killed by a usurper (Enrico's uncle), who has himself just died, succeeded by his son, Guido. Enrico plans an assault on the castle, discovering that Guido is about to marry Elisa, whom Enrico also loves. Fortunately, things work out for a happy ending.

So what does Paoli do with *Enrico* at Bergamo's Donizetti Festival? She turns it into a 'theatre within a theatre' show. It's November 1818 and the cast and crew are about to stage ... *Enrico di Borgogna*. The prima donna is throwing a strop and the singer of the title-role, Fanny Eckerlin, has gone awol. In desperation, the impresario shoves a young seamstress on to the stage, score in hand, to sing Enrico

instead. She does – triumphantly – because said seamstress is Anna Bonitatibus and *bel canto* is what she does best.

Bonitatibus's softly bronzed mezzo is wonderfully agile, her technique superb in Enrico's florid opening cavatina 'Care aurette che spiegate'. Her coloratura is even but never showy. Why she's not a superstar of the operatic firmament is anyone's guess. Sonia Ganassi, another mezzo, sings Elisa well, although her larger instrument is occasionally unwieldy. She and Bonitatibus blend well in their pearl of a duet in Act 2. Levy Sekgapane takes on the role of the tyrant, Guido. His high notes have a bright, metallic sheen (Rossini tenor roles are his forte) but there are some heavy aspirates too. The rest of the cast aren't quite up to this level but are reliable. Alessandro De Marchi conducts the period band Academia Montis Regalis with verve.

Paoli's production, as you'd imagine, doesn't take itself too seriously and is a lot of fun as a result, such as the extra in a bear costume who pops up comically in various 'serious' scenes. Singers – including the bear – strike silly poses in the Act 1 finale as the impresario frantically tries to shift the scenery for Act 2. Before the finale, the chorus 'Crush him! Kill him!' switches focus to the impresario, as they try and extract their wages from him, while halfway through Enrico's closing rondo cast and crew depart – eager to get home – leaving Bonitatibus singing her heart out on an empty stage. Not perhaps what Donizetti intended, but it does the job very well indeed. **Mark Pullinger**

Handel

Almira

Emőke Baráth *sop* Almira
Amanda Forsythe *sop* Edilia
Teresa Wakim *sop* Bellante
Christian Immler *bar* Consalvo
Zachary Wilder *ten* Osman
Colin Balzer *ten* Fernando
Jesse Blumberg *bar* Raymondo
Jan Kobow *ten* Tabarco

Boston Early Music Festival Orchestra /

Paul O'Dette, Stephen Stubbs

CPO (F) 4 CPO555 205-2 (4h 2' • DDD)

Includes synopsis, libretto and translation



Handel's first opera, *Almira* (January 1705), is the only one of his

juvenile works for Hamburg's Gänsemarkt theatre that survives in almost complete form. Based indirectly on an old Venetian opera (1691), the drama is set in medieval Valladolid: newly crowned Queen Almira of Castile appoints her guardian Consalvo as her advisor and is expected to marry one of his sons, but she is secretly in love with the foundling Fernando. There is little prize for guessing that Fernando turns out to be Consalvo's long-lost son (thought to have drowned in infancy), but working this out takes about four hours of complicated entanglements and often daftly impetuous misunderstandings – the happy ending requires a triple wedding.

The inexperienced 19-year-old's score is a compound of Italian, German and French elements that was customary in Hamburg productions of the period: 52 arias are predominantly very short (about a third accompanied only by continuo), yet 15 of them have Italian texts. All three acts contain French-style dances, and the first few scenes of Act 3 are an entrée for dancing Europeans, Africans, Asians (whose saraband has more than a whiff of 'Lascia ch'io pianga') and Jesters.

Boston Early Music Festival's concertmaster Robert Mealy and artistic co-directors Paul O'Dette and Stephen Stubbs prepared their own performing edition, reconstructed a few missing portions of music, and provided a persuasive orchestration for Almira's 'Ingrato, spietato' (its voice and bass lines rediscovered in 2004). There are distinctive differences from the opera's



Early Donizetti from Bergamo: Silvia Paoli's production of the rarely seen Enrico di Borgogna doesn't take itself too seriously

only previous recording (also on CPO), such as the Bostonians' artistic licence to use harp continuo (applied copiously in continuo arias) and occasional sprinkles of percussion; very loud castanets besmirch the 'Spanish' saraband in Act 1. A hurdy-gurdy drone during the comic servant Tabarco's turn as Folly in the Act 3 entrée is a suitable solution to the stage direction mentioning 'Sackpfeiffe'.

Almira's heartbroken reaction to Fernando's perceived infidelity ('Geloso tormento') is a sensitive dialogue between Emőke Baráth and plaintive solo oboe, accompanied by tense pulsing strings. Elsewhere, Baráth's supple coloratura is shown off admirably and takes in a few light throwaway top Cs. Indeed, no other Handel score has so many written top Cs, and the majority are dispatched with quicksilver deftness by Amanda Forsythe's Edilia. Her entrance is a lovely pastoral with recorders and concertante violins in

its middle section, swapping over to oboes in the short modified *da capo*, whereas several tempestuous arias showcase Forsythe's agility and finesse – and foreshadow cantatas Handel would write in Rome a few years later.

Colin Balzer's Fernando is equally adept at ardent, shapely singing and brawnier heroism. His Act 3 prison scene charts an emotional trajectory through a turbulent F minor aria of distress, an accompanied recitative, a gentle lament expressing eternal love for Almira and their giddy (short) duet of reconciliation. Zachary Wilder's Osman displays superb technical control and smooth delivery of fiendish coloratura. He ends up hitched to Bellante, sung sweetly by Teresa Wakim (albeit with a touch of unsteadiness). Jesse Blumberg contributes warm-toned seductive singing as Raymondo (the Moorish king of Mauretania), Christian Immler's intelligent singing makes more out of

Consalvo than Handel's perfunctory music suggests, and Jan Kobow's comic timing and inflection are spot-on as Tabarco.

The only cut is a Rondeau omitted from Act 1 scene 11. This is a revelatory milestone in resuscitating the artistic currency of Handel's operatic debut.

David Vickers

Comparative version:

Lawrence-King (7/96) (CPO) CPO999 275-2

Paer

Agnese

María Rey-Joly <i>sop.</i>	Agnese
Markus Werba <i>bar.</i>	Uberto
Edgardo Rocha <i>ten.</i>	Ernesto
Filippo Morace <i>bass-baritone</i>	Don Pasquale
Andrea Giovannini <i>ten.</i>	Don Girolamo
Lucia Cirillo <i>mez.</i>	Carlotta
Giulia Della Peruta <i>sop.</i>	Vespina
Federico Benetti <i>bass-bar.</i>	Warden
Chorus and Orchestra of the Teatro Regio, Turin / Diego Fasolis	



Stage director **Leo Muscato**

Video director **Tiziano Mancini**

Dynamic (F) DVD 37850; (F) Blu-ray 57850

(172' • NTSC • 16:9 • 1080i • DTS-HD MA5.1,

DD5.1 & PCM stereo • 0 • s)

Recorded live, March 10 & 14, 2019

Includes synopsis



Ferdinando Paer (1771–1839) is best known nowadays as the composer of *Leonora* (1804), based on the same subject as *Fidelio*,

which it is also thought to have influenced. In his lifetime, however, *Agnese* was the work that made him famous. It was written in 1809 for private performance at the Palazzo Scotti near Parma, before it made its way into Europe's opera houses. By the time it reached Paris's Théâtre Italien in 1824, it had become a star vehicle, and Paer revised the score for Giuditta Pasta and Marco Bordogni, cast as the feuding Agnese and Ernesto. His reputation, however, was eventually eclipsed by that of Rossini, and after his death, *Agnese* remained in limbo until 2019, when it was revived in Turin, in the production filmed here, directed by Leo Muscato and conducted by Diego Fasolis.

The dramaturgy, dealing with madness and reconciliation, strikingly reminds us at times of late Shakespeare in its portrait of Agnese, fleeing back home from an unhappy marriage with the feckless Ernesto, only to find her father Uberto confined in a mental hospital, unhinged by her elopement, now believing her dead, and kept alive solely by the hope he will one day find her grave. Father and daughter are brought back together again by the intervention, under the watchful eye of the hospital's perennially optimistic manager Don Pasquale, of the physician Girolamo, whose cure involves trying to persuade Uberto that Agnese has never left him and that the woman who cares for him – and whom he now no longer recognises – is indeed his daughter.

The score pivots back to Mozart and forwards to Rossini, as ensembles suggesting 18th-century models collide with with set-piece arias, in which the dominant *bel canto* form of recitative, cavatina and cabaletta is already very much in place. As in *Leonora*, however, we're also aware of Paer's own original voice, in his attractive melodies and striking powers of orchestration. There are some remarkable passages, which

Fasolis and his excellent Turin forces mine for all their worth. The ferocious opening storm, through which Ernesto pursues Agnese, casts long shadows over the rest of the work, and the pattering pizzicatos and meandering horn solos with which Paer suggests Uberto's confusion are beautifully done.

The singing makes up in commitment for what it sometimes lacks in finesse. The best performance comes from Markus Werba as Uberto, handsomely voiced, superbly acted and heartbreaking in his recognition scene with María Rey-Joly's Agnese. She takes a while to get into her stride, though her voice blazes with conviction in her big second-act rondo, where her upper registers are thrilling. Filippo Morace's Pasquale blusters a bit and Edgardo Rocha is pushed at times as Ernesto, his coloratura not always flowing as smoothly as it might.

Muscato, meanwhile, updates the opera to the 1930s and gives it a surreal twist. Not all of his staging works. The set consists of enormous medicine tins that open to reveal the forest where Agnese hides from Ernesto, or Pasquale's study, its shelves groaning under the weight of unread medical tomes. The sight of Uberto drawing graves and coffins on the walls of his cell is rightly unnerving but the wider view of the hospital, with its ceaselessly twitching patients overseen by bearded men in drag as nuns-cum-warders, is questionable. It's by no means perfect, though the work itself is fascinating and deserves to be heard more frequently. **Tim Ashley**

Rossini

Zelmira

Federico Sacchi *bass*.....Polidoro

Silvia Dalla Benetta *sop*.....Zelmira

Mert Süngü *ten*.....Ilo

Joshua Stewart *ten*.....Antenore

Marina Comparato *mez*.....Emma

Luca Dall'Amico *bass*.....Leucippo

Xiang Xu *ten*.....Eacide

Emmanuel Franco *bar*.....High Priest

Górecki Chamber Choir, Kraków;

Virtuosi Brunensis / Gianluigi Gelmetti

Naxos (B) (3) 8 660468/70 (175' • DDD)

Recorded live at the Trinkhalle, Bad Wildbad,

Germany, July 19-21 & 27, 2017

Italian libretto available from naxos.com



There is a sense in which *Zelmira*, the last of Rossini's

Neapolitan operas, premiered in February 1822, is an elegantly crafted throwback. But to what? And why was Rossini obliged to adjust the end for a revival at Paris's Théâtre Italien in 1826? This would be a somewhat academic question had the 2017 Rossini in Wildbad Festival not chosen to perform *Zelmira* in that Paris revision.

The background to *Zelmira* is the republican revolt that had occurred in Naples the previous summer. Metternich had moved quickly to restore the monarchy. As the dust settled, the story of an elderly Greek king, who is saved by his daughter from the machinations of a murderous overlord, was chosen by the Teatro San Carlo for its next commission. Rossini was happy to set this old-fashioned legend, though his mind was more on Vienna, to which Metternich had invited the company that spring. It was Rossini's first engagement outside Italy, making *Zelmira* something of a showcase both for himself and for Naples' stellar array of singers.

There was, however, one snag. As *Zelmira* toured, first to Vienna and later to London, it was clear that the voice of 37-year-old Isabella Colbran, Naples' *prima donna assoluta* during Rossini's time there, was in serious decline. When the opera was revived in Paris, Rossini cast Giuditta Pasta as Zelmira, a move that involved stripping out much of her joyous, Colbran-inspired final aria and adding a newly composed prayer alongside a *stretta* taken from Rossini's already neglected *Ermione*. Rossini was working for the Paris Opéra at the time, turning *Maometto II* into the more theatrically effective *Le siège de Corinthe*. But this Pasta-inspired revision is no more than an off-the-cuff patch written in a new, almost Bellini-like idiom.

Wildbad's Zelmira, Silvia Dalla Benetta, copes rather well, first with the prayer and then with the somewhat thankless task of trying to make sense of what's left of Zelmira's final number. She, however, is the best of a cast which, for the most part, simply isn't up to the task of recreating an opera written for some of the greatest singers of Rossini's age.

The performance is very well conducted by Gianluigi Gelmetti, which means that scenes such as the Act 1 finale, where the principals are more players than showcasing soloists, come over well enough. But his cast is not a patch on that of the generally superb 1989 Claudio Scimone recording (Erato, 6/90), where Chris Merritt sings the usurper king Antenore and the young William

Matteuzzi is in shining form as Ilo, Prince of Troy. And if you are going to include the Act 2 aria for Zelmira's confidante Emma, which Rossini added in Vienna for Fanny Eckerlin, better have it sung by a singer of the quality of Scimone's Bernarda Fink.

Sadly, the Scimone is currently available only as part of Warner's 50-CD Rossini Edition (12/18), which no longer retails at a rock-bottom price. And no download is available. A 2003 Opera Rara recording (12/04), made live at the Edinburgh Festival, is available to download but that, too, is difficult to recommend. **Richard Osborne**

Thomas

Hamlet

Stéphane Degout bar Hamlet
Sabine Devieille sop Ophélie
Julien Behr ten Laërte
Sylvie Brunet-Grupposo mez Gertrude
Laurent Alvaro bass-bar Claudius
Jérôme Varnier bass Ghost
Kevin Amiel ten Marcellus/Second Gravedigger
Yoann Dubruque bar Horatio/First Gravedigger
Nicolas Legoux bass-bar Polonius
Les Éléments; Orchestre des Champs-Élysées / Louis Langrée

Stage director **Cyril Teste**

Video director **François Roussillon**

Naxos ©  2 110640; ©  NBD0103V
 (171' • NTSC • 16:9 • 1080i • DTS-HD MA5.1, DTS5.1 & PCM stereo • 0 • s)

Recorded live at the Opéra-Comique, Paris, December 19 & 21, 2018

Includes synopsis



Staged at the Opéra-Comique to mark the 150th anniversary of its premiere in the slightly grander setting of the Opéra,

Cyril Teste's production of *Hamlet* hauls Ambroise Thomas's tragedy into the present day and probes its complexities with an anti-Romantic dispassion that at times borders on the surgical. Based on Alexandre Dumas and Paul Meurice's 1847 adaptation of Shakespeare, rather than the original play, the piece itself has, of course, been much castigated, often unfairly and above all by anglophone critics, for its divergences from Shakespeare's narrative, most notably the ending, in which Hamlet survives to be crowned king. The score, however, contains much that is strikingly original in its sustained mood of pervasive melancholy, the genuine frissons of its supernatural confrontations and its consistently expressive vocal writing, even in passages such as Ophélie's mad scene, where virtuosity is paramount.

Appropriately enough for a work in which a play within an opera reveals unpalatable truths to those watching it, Teste takes the Opéra-Comique itself as a metaphor for his exploration of the underlying relationship between illusion and reality. Video is integral to his scheme, some of it pre-recorded, some of it captured live by the cameramen we see among the performers, all of it projected on the sliding screens of Ramy Fischler's sets. It allows Teste to take us backstage, where we see Laurent Alvaro's Claudius getting ready for his first royal appearance, and into the theatre's bar, where Sabine Devieille's distraught Ophélie swigs whisky after Hamlet's desertion. Teste also uses the whole of the theatre's stalls, where Jérôme Varnier's Ghost rises awesomely from among the audience, and where Stéphane Degout's Hamlet rampages gleefully after 'The Murder of Gonzago' has brought Claudius's guilt to light.

Some of Teste's interpretative glosses can be unnerving. There are hints of an unseemly intimacy between Ophélie and Julien Behr's Laërte, to which Hamlet is privy. The mad scene is deeply creepy as stagehands pack up the remnants of Ophélie's life even before its end, and the Gravediggers have become morticians clinically laying out her corpse. François Roussillon's video direction, however, occasionally spends too much time in long shot to capture the multiple video projections on stage, and no amount of skilful filming can quite replicate what must have been an immersive experience for the audience with so much of the production happening round them.

Where Roussillon scores highly, though, is in his often remorseless close-up focus on Degout so that we see every furrow of sorrow on his face and every glint of desire or anger in his eyes. He gives one of his greatest performances here, marvellously sung and acted, with every gesture, vocal and physical, affording us insight into Hamlet's disturbed psyche: it's an extraordinary achievement. Devieille makes an outstanding Ophélie, touching and vulnerable, her coloratura dazzlingly precise but never vacuously showy. Sylvie Brunet-Grupposo's Gertrude can occasionally be grand-manner but there's terrific tension in her big showdown with Degout. Alvaro's handsomely acted Claudius lacks focus in his lower registers. Behr, in contrast, is impeccably stylish, and you rather wish Thomas had given Laërte more to do. Louis Langrée really knows how to make this music live and breathe, and the playing, choral singing and recorded sound are all exemplary. Buy it and watch it, above all for Degout, who is unmissable and unforgettable.

Tim Ashley

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Verdi

Traviata - Vous mériter un avenir meilleurJudith Chemla *sng* ViolettaDamien Bigourdan *ten* AlfredoJérôme Billy *ten* GermontÉlise Chauvin *sop* Flora/AnninaFlorent Baffi *bass* Doctor Grenvil**Chorus and Orchestra**Stage director **Benjamin Lazar**A film by **Corentin Leconte**

BelAir Classiques (F) DVD BAC156; (F) BAC456

(130' • NTSC • 16:9 • 1080i • DTS-HD MA5.1, DD5.1 &

Dolby stereo • 0 • s)

*La traviata*

has surely been subjected to as many directorial rethinkings as any opera in the

repertoire, with Peter Konwitschny's Graz production (Arthaus, 4/12, also seen at English National Opera) even taking the rare step of trimming down the score to turn it into a taut, interval-less couple of hours. Now, following on from similar treatments by Peter Brook of *Carmen* and *Die Zauberflöte*, Théâtre des Bouffes du Nord give us a radically rethought, reworked and distilled *Traviata*.

In fact, as we open on a wild, illicit party, it takes some time to detect any of Verdi's work. Slowly it asserts itself, but the whole show retains a refreshingly fluid attitude to *La traviata* as we know it. Virtually all of the score is represented in one way or another. Some parts are performed relatively straight, with others presented in fragments by a small instrumental ensemble that is fully part of the action: Act 2's gypsies materialise as fragments of a drug-fuelled hallucination; Act 3's carnival likewise features as a nightmarish vision. Schumann's 'Der Vogel als Prophet' pops up unexpectedly, too.

Spoken French, often presented as melodrama, is interspersed with the sung Italian of Piave's libretto, with results that are free and fresh, direct and often moving in unexpected ways. The set is minimal, and the action itself seems to vacillate between today's Paris and that of Dumas *filks*, a certain vagueness helping us avoid the clashes of text and context that can cripple more concrete updatings – the English subtitles tell us Violetta's life is threatened by a 'cell disease'. The cast, too, has clearly been chosen for being convincing both in the sung and spoken

passages and, on occasion, even in tinkling the ivories of the Pleyel piano that sits on hand.

Judith Chemla is compelling as Violetta, whose exchanges with Damien Bigourdan's Alfredo are by turns charming and, in a viscerally powerful performance of the final scene, profoundly affecting. Jérôme Billy has a more difficult task bringing Germont *père* to life in the context but does so extremely well, and everyone else helps to create a memorable, seamless dramatic universe. Only the extended scene in which Florent Baffi's Doctor prepares drugs for Flora's party tests the patience.

Forget preconceptions, ignore the incomprehensible blurb on the case: this is a strange but rewarding and often compelling view of a familiar warhorse, and a bold, convincing example of how to rework a familiar text for a new context. **Hugo Shirley**

'Brillez, astres nouveaux!'

Boismortier Daphnis et Chloé - Cesse de répandre des larmes. Les voyages de l'Amour - Doux sommeil **Bury** Les caractères de la Folie - Ouverture; Charmant Amour, âme du monde **Cardonne** Omphale **Dauvergne** Canente. Polyxène - Premier et deuxième Airs **Gervais** Pomone - Quels doux concerts **Leclair** Scylla et Glaucus - Symphonie pour la descente de Vénus **Mondonville** Le carnaval du Parnasse - Que votre gloire vous rassemble. Les Fêtes de Paphos - Laissons de mon amour **Rameau** Castor et Pollux - Brillez, astres nouveaux. Dardanus - Courez à la victoire. Les fêtes d'Hébé - Dieu tout puissant; Dieux qui me condamnez; Éclatante trompette, annoncez; Veillez sur ces guerriers. La naissance d'Osiris - Musette tendre. Les Paladins - Triste séjour. Le temple de la gloire - Tout rang, tout sexe, tout âge; Vole, charmant Amour **Royer** Le pouvoir de l'Amour - Marche; Ouverture; Ritournelle; Quelle vengeance! quelle horreur **Chantal Santon Jeffery** *sop* **Purcell** Choir; **Orfeo Orchestra** / **György Vashegyi** Aparté (F) AP223 (77' • DDD) Includes texts and translations



The conductor György Vashegyi and the soprano Chantal Santon-

Jeffery are no strangers to Rameau. They appear together on *Naiïs* (Glossa, 8/18) and *Les Indes galantes* (6/19); she is also to be heard in *Les fêtes de l'Hymen et de l'Amour* under Hervé Niquet

(12/14) and *Le temple de la gloire* under Nicholas McGegan (PBP, 9/18), while he and his Hungarian forces have recorded *Les fêtes de Polymnie* (Glossa, 4/15). Here we have a mouth-watering selection of excerpts from 17 French Baroque operas, ranging from Gervais's *Pomone* (1720) to Cardonne's *Omphale* (1769), of which six are by the great man himself.

Not all the pieces are for the voice. One of the pleasures of the disc lies in noting the artful inclusion of orchestral numbers. After the first excerpt from Rameau's *Les fêtes d'Hébé* comes a Ritournelle from Royer's *Le pouvoir de l'Amour*, which leads seamlessly back into the Rameau. Indeed, great care has evidently been taken over the order in which the items appear. I loved the way the mournful bassoon of 'Triste séjour' from Rameau's *Les Paladins* is followed by what sounds like three bassoons in 'Laissons de mon amour' from Mondonville's *Les fêtes de Paphos*. And 'Éclatante trompette' (*Les fêtes d'Hébé*) is aptly preceded by 'Courez à la victoire' from Rameau's *Dardanus*. There's much delight to be had from the scoring: flutes in the sleep scene from Boismortier's *Les voyages de l'Amour*, piccolos in *Pomone*, bassoons again in Dauvergne's *Canente*. As in the recordings mentioned above, the Orfeo Orchestra – and the Purcell Choir, too – perform beautifully under Vashegyi.

Chantal Santon Jeffery – now without the hyphen – skilfully conveys a wide range of emotions. She ends with a brisk performance of the title-number, 'Brillez, astres nouveaux' from Rameau's *Castor et Pollux*, a good example of a cheerful piece in a minor key. The scene from Cardonne's *Omphale* is particularly well done, an impassioned accompanied recitative for Argine that fades away as she sings 'I die of love and sorrow'. And Jeffery is similarly moving in the Dauvergne opera, where Canente attempts to win over a chorus of sorcerers in the manner of Orpheus and the Furies; they submit simultaneously with her last plea, an effective touch.

The booklet includes texts and translations, and an interesting background article by Benoît Dratwicki: nothing about the dramatic situations, though, and there's a confusing reference to Mondonville's *Le carnaval du Parnasse* when what is meant is his *Les fêtes de Paphos*.

Richard Lawrence



Stéphane Degout and Sabine Devieille are outstanding in the sustained melancholy of Ambroise Thomas's *Hamlet* - see review on page 113

'French Arias'

Berlioz *Les Troyens* - O blonde Cérés **Bizet**

Les pêcheurs de perles - Je crois entendre encore **Delibes** *Lakmé* - Prendre le dessin d'un bijou ... Fantaisie aux divins mensonges **Donizetti** *La fille du régiment* - Ah! Mes amis, quel jour de fête!; Pour me rapprocher de Marie **Gounod** *Faust* - Salut! Demeure chaste et pure. Roméo et Juliette - Ah! Lève-toi, soleil!; Ange adorable **Lalo** *Le roi d'Ys* - Puisqu'on ne peut fléchir **Massenet** *Manon* - En fermant les yeux. *Werther* - O nature pleine de grâce **Offenbach** *La belle Hélène* - Au mont Ida

Petr Nekoraneć *ten* ^a**Zuzana Marková** *sop* **Czech Philharmonic Orchestra** / **Christopher Franklin** Supraphon © SU4260-2 (57) • DDD



Already the winner of multiple prizes, as well as a member of Oper Stuttgart's

ensemble, the 26-year-old Czech tenor Petr Nekoraneć is clearly a name to watch – and was indeed our 'One to Watch' last month. 'Very gallant and elegant', noted Tim Ashley when Nekoraneć popped up a couple of years ago on a Supraphon collection of Dvořák's folk songs (9/18), and there's plenty more gallantry and elegance on this, his solo debut on the label – plus a whole lot more.

What is immediately striking is Nekoraneć's light, easy timbre, with an occasional hint of an appealing flutter. There's nothing effortful or forced, and he is able to move seamlessly across his range up to top notes that he seems able to control at will. He's able to weave the top C of *Faust*'s 'Salut! Demeure chaste e pure' into a long melodic arch, while there's an impressive, seductive diminuendo on the top B flat of *Roméo*'s aria.

He spins a glorious line in the *Pearl Fishers* aria, and, though *Werther* might be a size too big for him on stage currently, he sings 'O nature pleine de grâce' with winning ardency. Occasionally there could be more characterisation and variety in the tone, while the French consonants could sometimes be clearer. It strikes me, too, that the tenor sounds a little less fresh in the two arias from *La fille du régiment* – although the top remains sweet and reliable, including of course a clutch more cleanly struck top Cs.

Christopher Franklin and the Czech Philharmonic offer decent support but Zuzana Marková makes a rather wobbly Juliette in the album's one duet. It's a shame, too, that Supraphon's engineering is a little hazy. Nevertheless, this is an extremely impressive, seductive debut from a tenor who looks to be destined for great things.

Hugo Shirley

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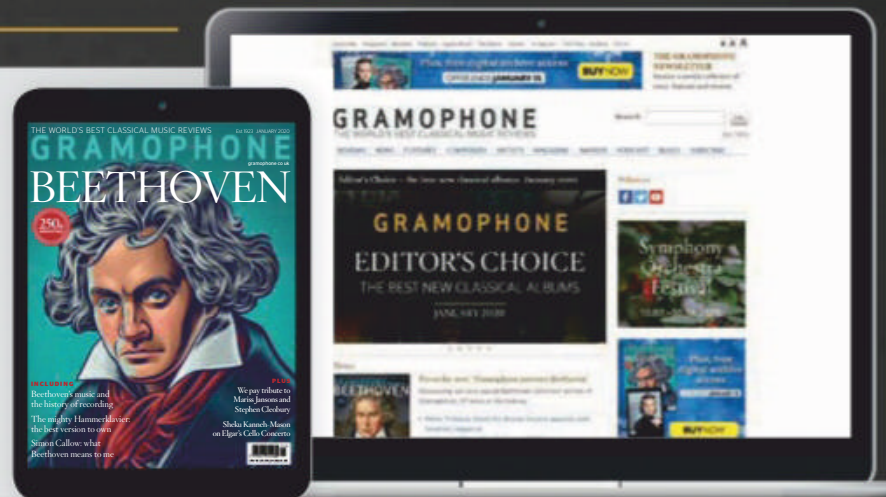


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The Editors of Gramophone's sister music magazines, Jazzwise and Songlines, recommend some of their favourite recordings from the past month

Jazz

Brought to you by **jazzwise**

Lakecia Benjamin

Pursuance: The Coltranes

Ropeadope © RAD535



New York City altoist Lakecia Benjamin has assembled an intergenerational all-star cast for this tribute

to Alice and John Coltrane, featuring arrangements of many of their best-known compositions. Some of Benjamin's interpretations are fairly classic in approach. 'Liberia' opens with a billowing introduction and swings hard into a feature for Gary Bartz, while 'Prema' is mellow and trance-like with waves of piano and delicate harp tracery. Other tracks have a more contemporary slant. 'Central Park West' has a breezy R&B flavour, and 'Om Shanti' gets a funk refit with Georgia Anne Muldrow on vocals and Meshell Ndegeocello supplying

the bass. 'Walk With Me', a sorrowful violin feature for Regina Carter, is one of the highlights. As is 'Alabama', where Benjamin is alone with her rhythm section, pouring her heart out. She plays with such passion and such commitment you know she means every note, and it's hard to think of a more fitting tribute to the Coltranes than that.

Thomas Rees

Oded Tzur

Here Be Dragons

ECM © 2676



Manfred Eicher has produced many albums for his ECM label that are now regarded as jazz classics. Some have taken time to be recognised as such, others have emerged with 'classic' written all over them. *Here Be Dragons* is in the latter category.

Tzur has studied Indian classical music and has brought pitch sliding, microtonal shading and the use of ragas and Indian scales into the forum of jazz. Of course, others have done this in the past but it is the highly personal way in which Tzur makes use of these resources, allied to a tonal approach to the tenor saxophone that is both unique and distinctive that marks this album with distinction. He is also a melodist whose considerations provide the guiding light for his improvised lines – there are no patterns, licks or gratuitous flourishes in Tzur's playing, rather the interlocking logic of a soloist who is concerned with developing an improvisational arc to both solo and composition, a story telling privilege that has a beginning, a developmental episode that leads to a destination. Tzur's sharply defined vision of music is subtly stated and his search for aesthetic clarity is shared by each member of his quartet. **Stuart Nicholson**

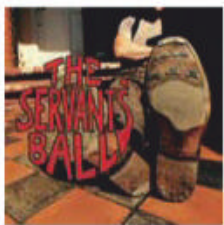
World Music

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The Servants' Ball

The Servants' Ball

D Wink Recordings © CD13



This exuberantly entertaining album came about after double bass player Ben Nicholls, reading about Sussex

concertina player Scan Tester, found a 1930s village hall dance band's set list. It was surprisingly eclectic: country dance tunes, ragtime, even light classical music. Tester's Imperial Band played whatever took their fancy and might get them another booking. Intrigued, Nicholls got The Servants' Ball together: Leveret's concertina player Rob Harbron, banjolele-playing step dancer Ewan Wardrop, fiddler Ben Paley, percussionist Evan Jenkins, and pianist Julian Hinton. They researched at the Museum of English Rural Life and the

British Museum, coming up with an album representing the evening's entertainment at the kind of dances Tester played. There's music hall songs, tunes to get you moving. It concludes with a bizarre version of 'Old King Cole'. His fiddlers three are a classy trio indeed – Paganini, Spagnoletti and Mori. Wonderful. **Julian May**

Tuulikki Bartosik

Tempest in a Teapot

Nordic Notes © PWM32; NN132



I would love to go on a long, long walk with Tuulikki Bartosik, gently humming as the leaves rustle underfoot, and the birds sing high in the trees. This album is rather like that, ushered in by the sweetest birdsong before the accordion becomes our guide. The landscape and nature of Estonia

has shaped her thinking, musically and personally, and while she is capable of delicious wildness and daring collaborations, there's a real intimacy in her music, which is one of the great strengths of *Tempest in a Teapot*. 'Forgotten Village Polka' is like coming across a clearing in the forest where a festival is in full swing, Bartosik and the accordion swept into an infectious dance. And that sense of journey is ever present in the mysterious title-track and the 'Rouge Waltz', which are as captivating as the forest mists. She ends with a song and the gentle sounds of the Estonian *kannel* (traditional zither) before we realise she has disappeared back into the forest world and the birdsong that she loves. From start to finish these are compelling performances from one of the finest of accordionists, and it's all been sensitively produced by legendary Swedish saxophonist and teacher Jonas Knutsson.

Fiona Talkington

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REISSUES & ARCHIVE

Our monthly guide to the most exciting catalogue releases, historic issues and box-sets

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Wilhelm Backhaus's Decca Recordings

Jed Distler reassesses the post-war legacy of the long-lived German pianist

The discography of **Wilhelm Backhaus** (1884-1969) encompassed a longer timeline than most pianists of his generation. He first entered the studio at the age of 24 in 1908 and recorded fairly frequently throughout the acoustic and early electrical eras. After the war Backhaus briefly resumed recording for HMV. When the label opted not to renew his contract, Decca stepped in, launching the most prolific part of his recording career, from 1950 until his death in 1969.

This long-awaited box brings Backhaus's complete Decca recordings together in one place for the first time. Its contents chiefly reflect the Austro-German orientation of Backhaus's post-war repertoire. About half of the recordings are given over to Beethoven: between 1950 and 1953 Backhaus taped all 32 sonatas, the *Diabelli* Variations and all the concertos except No 1. He did the concertos again in stereo – all five this time – and began the sonatas anew, eventually remaking all but one; he never got around to a stereo *Hammerklavier*.

In his January 2020 article 'Preserving Beethoven's Legacy', Richard Osborne placed Backhaus alongside Arturo Toscanini, Erich Kleiber, Artur Schnabel and others as a proponent of the 'new objectivity' in Beethoven-playing that favoured a more literal, less 'Romantic' interpretation of the texts. There is some truth to this (the mono Op 7, the stereo Op 26 'Funeral March' Sonata), yet time and again strong traces of German Romanticism emerge that have little in common with Schnabel and his followers or, for that matter, Wilhelm Kempff's linearly orientated, intimately scaled interpretations. Backhaus is not averse to fleshing out textures by adding bass octaves or breaking the hands at will: his grandiloquent Op 106 *Hammerklavier* first movement is an extreme example. In

Rondo finales, Backhaus sometimes takes a bar or more to establish the basic tempo (Op 14 No 1, for example). He flattens out Beethoven's wide and frequently sudden contrasts in dynamics. My late American colleague Harris Goldsmith also took Backhaus to task for his failure to reach emotional boiling temperature in the more expressive movements.

To be fair, sonic considerations sometimes inform these judgements. The mono sonata set's close, slightly airless engineering lacks the warmth and roundness of Wilhelm Kempff's mono DG versions or the ample, full-bodied pickup characterising Yves Nat's Beethoven cycle, among early-1950s competitors. Interestingly, the mono concertos convey a realistic ambience and heft that I find superior to the more strident, bottom-deficient stereo traversals.

This long-awaited box brings Backhaus's Decca recordings together in one place for the first time

That said, Decca's new restorations from the best available sources reveal the mono sonatas in more judiciously equalised light, with improved clarity and definition at the top end. It comes closer to what I hear from several well-preserved American LP pressings in my collection, as opposed to Pristine Classical's enhanced ambient soundscape. However, the latter label's Backhaus Beethoven may appeal to collectors in the way that some movie fans prefer colourised versions of black-and-white films. In the mono cycle, I notice occasional pitching variables between sessions. For example, the Sonata Op 90 recorded in Geneva's Victoria Hall in November 1953 reproduces almost a quarter-tone flatter than the Op 101

recorded in the same venue in April 1952. Was it the speed of the recording machines? Or different piano tunings?

Since a common aesthetic generally prevails throughout both mono and stereo sonata cycles (along with the omission of most repeats), detailed comparisons may only interest specialists with time on their hands. Nevertheless, noticeable differences warrant commentary. Compare, for example, the earlier cut-and-dried and technically assured Op 78 and Op 101 traversals to Backhaus's more subjective remakes. The heavy-handed stereo Opp 54, 79 and 81a (*Les adieux*) fall short of the mono studio versions' fluidity. Better still are the Opp 79 and 81a included in Backhaus's March 1954 American comeback recital at Carnegie Hall. The latter, by the way, is presented complete, with all encores intact, as well as the pianist's improvising between selections.

Similar interpretative characteristics apply to Backhaus's Haydn and Mozart, with comparably hit-and-miss results. The pianist rolls out the opening of Haydn's valedictory E flat Sonata at considerably less than an *Allegro*, yet gradually wends his way towards the right tempo (more or less), followed by one of the pianist's most expansively sustained slow-movement performances. At first I felt his plain-spoken phrasing in the wonderful two-movement C major HobXVI:48 perfunctory and aloof, yet repeated hearings reveal a subtle unfolding momentum. The C major Fantasia's humorous inferences elude Backhaus but his E minor HobXVI:34 *Presto* first movement conveys an appealingly brisk classical reserve. It was a joy to rediscover Backhaus's heartfelt and eloquent account of the F minor Variations, omitted repeats and all.

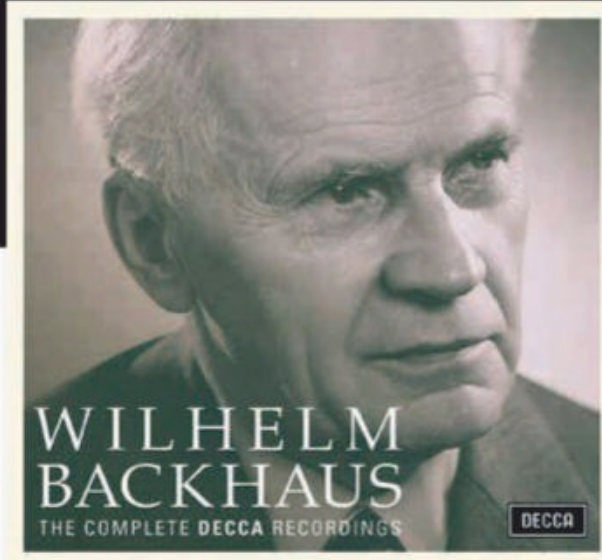
Behind old-fashioned lingerings and accelerations in the *Allegro moderato* of



Prolific Beethovenian: Wilhelm Backhaus

Mozart's K330 Sonata is a genuine singing impulse; ditto the more forthrightly projected F major (K332) and E flat (K282) Sonatas, and the A minor Rondo, K511, in both mono and stereo. The *Presto* of K283 in G, however, shows Backhaus in stiff and wooden estate. For me, the pianist's most sensitive and insightful Mozart-playing occurs in the 1955 B flat Concerto, K595, with Karl Böhm directing the Vienna Philharmonic – a superb example of Decca's early stereo technology.

Backhaus and Böhm returned to Vienna in 1967 to tape a justifiably acclaimed Brahms Second Piano Concerto, where the Olympian solidity of the pianist's two earlier recorded versions has loosened a bit, yet his greater attention to voice-leading and wider breadth of expressive inflection compensate for the better. The 1953 Backhaus/Böhm/Vienna Brahms First Piano Concerto doesn't match the fiery qualities and orchestral lustre of the rival Curzon/van Beinum/Concertgebouw version recorded for Decca that same year. Yet Backhaus's tone opens up for some lovely spacious phrasing in the slow movement. His sober, undemonstrative and utterly effortless grasp of the piano parts of both of Brahms's cello sonatas in collaboration with Pierre Fournier applies as well to the stereo solo Brahms selections



(these, however, lack the burly thrust of Backhaus's pre-war HMV Brahms outings).

Backhaus's Decca Chopin sessions rarely capture the stylistic aplomb and technical élan of his 1928 HMV *Études* set (save for three deliciously turned Mazurkas and the A flat Waltz, Op 34 No 1). Bach and Mendelssohn were never strong points for a pianist who emphasised mass over line. But the affectionate, quasi-salonish Schubert *Moments musicaux* from 1955 far surpass the tenuous counterparts from Backhaus's final concerts, where he inadvertently omits No 3's introductory vamping bars. And he's on supple, rippling form for the studio Schubert B flat 'Theme and Variations' Impromptu, D935 No 3; a pity Backhaus didn't grant posterity at least one Schubert sonata recording.


Backhaus's Schumann discography is also small and selective, yet it is more artistically enduring. His justly legendary pre-war C major Fantasy for HMV, of course, lies outside of the Decca box's purview, but *Waldszenen*'s slower movements have a

hearty rumination that sits well alongside the classic Clara Haskil and Sviatoslav Richter mono traversals. *Gramophone* gave Backhaus's Schumann Concerto a warm welcome in the July 1960 issue, accurately citing the realistic soloist/orchestra balance and hand-in-glove repartee. Somehow this version never caught on, possibly because it stood alone on two LP sides, uncoupled. I consider it one of Backhaus's most underrated and illuminating recordings.

The pianist downplays Schumann's mercurial mood swings in favour of symphonic continuity, building sonorities from the bottom up. The thick chords never splinter for a second, while rapid passagework, decorative sequences and long trills are firmly etched and decisively shaped. In Backhaus's hands, the cadenza's gnarly textures and imitative writing convey such Jovian force and kinetic impact that I'm reminded of how Carlos Kleiber described conducting the Berlin Philharmonic in the opening chords of Beethoven's *Corolian* Overture as if he was 'running into a wall at 60 miles per hour with a Rolls-Royce'.

Yet, as the 1960 *Gramophone* review suggests, Backhaus is every inch the team player, pulling back when ensemble *tutti*s or first-desk soloists have centre stage. While Günter Wand obtains palpable linear clarity and across-the-floor discipline from the Vienna Philharmonic, he allows the orchestra's individual qualities to shine, from the first oboe's penetrating, slightly acidic tone to the affectionate yet never vulgar string portamentos.

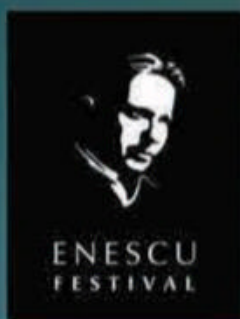
The collection includes a 118-page booklet containing full discographical information, a box contents list by composer, plus excellent and refreshingly frank annotations by Jonathan Summers. In sum, my overall response to Backhaus's Decca output veers between admiration and ambivalence, yet that takes nothing away from his importance as a major exponent of the German school, whose body of work should be accessible to younger generations of pianists, scholars and music lovers.

Decca deserves kudos for going about this project in the right way, notwithstanding my aforementioned remastering quibbles. And purely in terms of cost per disc, Decca offers outstanding value that may clinch the deal with prospective customers. Just don't expect it to stay in print forever. 

THE RECORDINGS

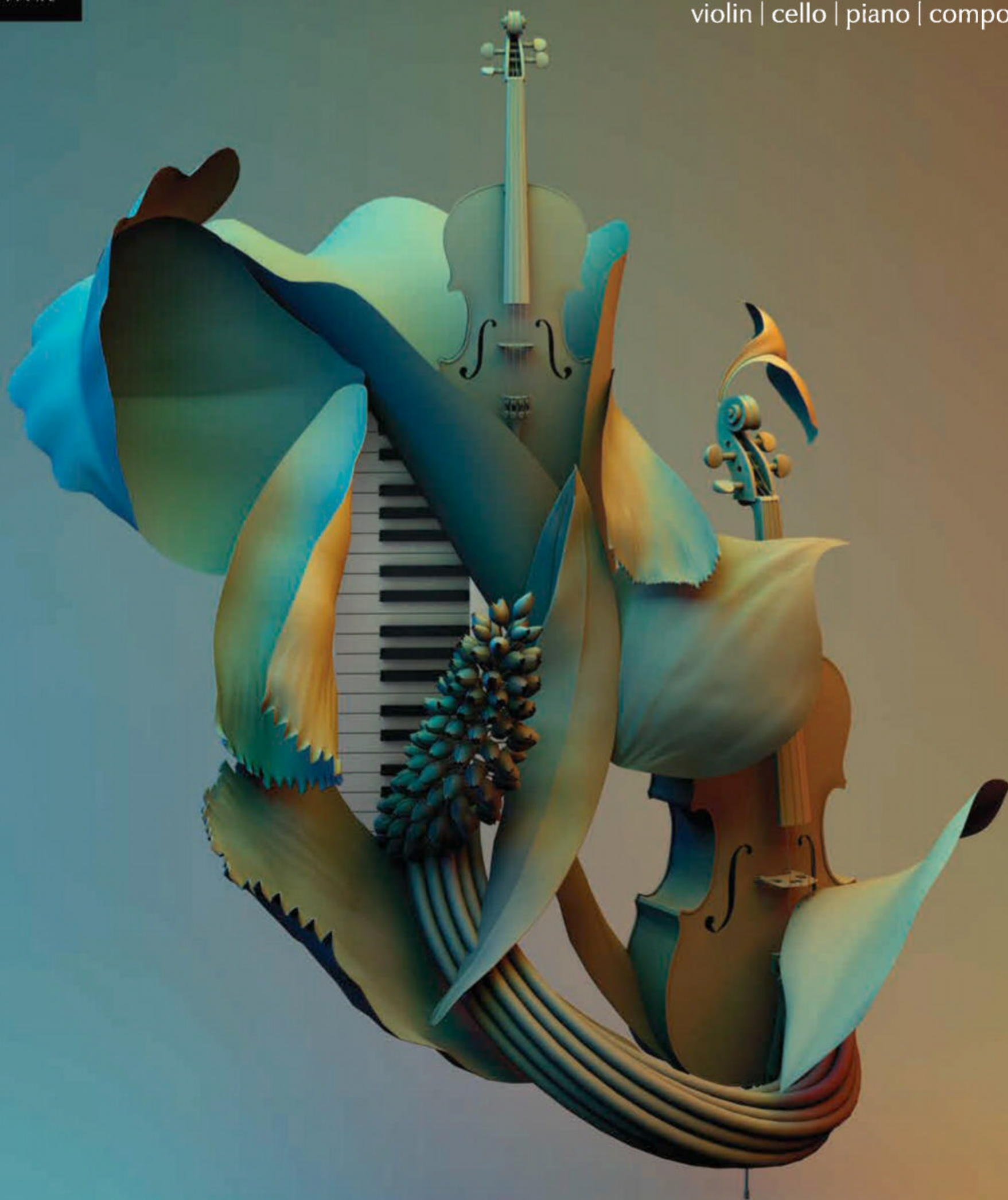
Complete Decca Recordings Backhaus

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Beauty in life

The Art of Ataúlfo Argenta

Peter Quantrill explores the legacy of an exciting but short-lived Spanish conductor

During his all-too-brief lifetime, Ataúlfo Argenta built a considerable reputation as a fiery interpreter of the music of his native Spain. The now-ubiquitous *Concierto de Aranjuez* was barely known ('I must tell you that Rodrigo's Guitar Concerto is a charmer,' wrote Trevor Harvey in 1955) when Argenta made one of its first recordings, with Narciso Yepes. Two years earlier he had begun recording for Decca, and his dedication to detail – musicians remarked on how hard Argenta worked them – as well as his concern for orchestral brilliance made him a good fit for the label's new 'Music from Spain' series, to which he could bring the practical experience of having made almost 50 zarzuela recordings.

Beyond the folkloristic colours of preludes and suites by Breton, Guridi and the like, Argenta also made the first recording of *Goyescas* in its operatic version with a superb native cast. Other rarities of significance dug up by Scribendum include Turina's *Sinfonia sevillana*, Halffter's *Sinfonietta* and Maurice Ohana's chilling lament over Ignacio Sánchez Mejías, a bullfighter/poet and friend of Lorca (who supplied the text) who died in the ring in 1934.

Almost all the published Decca recordings are reissued here, mostly in their stereo versions, though not in the case of the Fourth Symphony of Tchaikovsky, which is billed on Scribendum as a live performance from the same May 1957 concert with the Orchestre de la Suisse Romande as the *Bartered Bride* Overture but sounds to me identical to the mono-engineered Decca recording remade in October 1955 (the initial sessions in May that year, which also included the *Serenade for Strings*, never having been released anywhere).

By that time, Argenta was making frequent appearances in Geneva and probably being lined up by Ernest Ansermet as his successor. Direct comparison between the two, however, reveals that Argenta went his own way: the opening tempo of their Decca *Ibéria* recordings may be identical but the younger man imparts an extra snap to the accents, a sway to the rhythm and frankly a sexiness beyond the reach of most modern conductors, however conscientious.

Its constituent parts scattered across several discs here, the LSO 'España'



Cut off in his prime: Ataúlfo Argenta was a Decca mainstay

album surveyed foreign composers on a Spanish holiday, made by Argenta during his only London-based recording sessions in order to pay for an operation for one of his daughters. It came as a revelation at the time and has remained a mainstay of the Decca catalogue. Even the usually salonish *Danzas españolas* by Moszkowski disclose surprising piquancy as well as natural swagger, while the Rimsky-Korsakov *Capriccio* and Chabrier title-work are given grace and vibrancy barely hinted at in more conventionally dramatic performances.

Whether live or in the studio, firm rhythm is a hallmark of his conducting

The new set allows for a more illuminating comparison with Argenta's other mentor, Carl Schuricht. A live *Eroica* from Madrid overcomes rather dull sound and a fractious audience in a long-breathed, slow-burning (but not slow) reading with much lively inner detail. Rather less representative of a putative Schuricht legacy is a live Brahms Second from Paris, previously issued on Tahra, excitable and at times skittish, with French-accented but featherweight orchestral sound. Several other live recordings are drawn from, or from the same source as, a four-CD set issued by the Spanish RTVE Musica label (7/99). Among the best of them is a live, instrumental-only *El Amor brujo* with the

Suisse Romande Orchestra, even more vivid and tense than his justly celebrated but rather crudely engineered Paris studio version with the mezzo-soprano Ana María Iriarte (Scribendum includes both).

Whether live or in the studio – and Argenta could create the atmosphere of the former in the context of the latter – firm rhythm is a hallmark of his conducting, very much to the advantage of Schubert's *Great C major* (it's too bad that Scribendum hasn't looked harder for the *Unfinished* also originally taped in Paris by the Club Francais du Disque, still awaiting transfer to CD), less

so in a foursquare *Pulcinella* Suite from the same 1951 concert as the Brahms Second. A live Fourth *Brandenburg Concerto* from Geneva also suggests that Argenta had little feeling for the Baroque, however fond the collective memories of all concerned around *Messiah* concerts given just before his sudden death, aged 44, from carbon monoxide poisoning in January 1958.

The set's riches make its shoddy presentation all the more regrettable: no booklet, no indication of sources, only a basic track-list on the back of each wallet. Poking around the 'official' (family-run?) ataulfoargenta.com will help, not least in biographical details that flesh out a picture of an inspirational musician cut off in his prime. Argenta neophytes could start with a *Symphonie fantastique*, his last Decca recording, made in Paris in November 1957. Intonation, ensemble and score-fidelity are all finely honed in service of the symphony's rough genius and dramatic extremes, with the last two movements possessed but not (quite) overwhelmed by some daemonic force. If only the story didn't end there. **G**

THE RECORDING



The Art of Ataúlfo Argenta
Scribendum
© (22 discs)
SC815

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BOX-SET *Round-up*

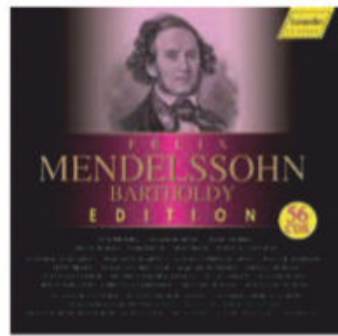
Rob Cowan enjoys a quartet of appealing collections, including an Eugène Ysaÿe gem

Hänssler Classic's handsome and extremely useful 56-CD **Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy Edition**

will likely pose a conundrum for those readers who already own a copy of 'Mendelssohn – the Masterworks' on Brilliant Classics (40 CDs), a less comprehensive collection that duplicates a number of performances included by Hänssler, most significantly *Elijah* under Helmut Rilling (Hänssler's *St Paul* is led by Doris Hagel) and memorable choral works involving the Chamber Choir of Europe with Nicol Matt conducting. Thereafter, there are major contrasts, most particularly with the numbered symphonies where Hänssler features high-octane performances by the Heidelberg Symphony Orchestra under Thomas Fey (who also take care of the string symphonies). Brilliant Classics shares the symphonic, or 'string symphonic', fare between the musical but rather less dynamic Frans Brüggen, Edo de Waart, Arnold Östman and Kurt Masur. Benjamin Frith is both boisterous and sensitive in the piano concertos, whereas Tianwa Yang tackles the two solo violin concertos and the F minor Sonata (which is also represented in a performance by the Nomos Duo, though I marginally prefer Yang and Romain Descharmes). The string quartets and other chamber works involve the likes of the Aurora Quartet, Minetti Quartet, Copenhagen Chamber Soloists, Vogler and Fine Arts Quartets and Bartholdy Piano Quartet, while the solo piano oeuvre is entrusted to the excellent Dana Protopopescu.

Interesting to see that the versions of the piano trios included involve the David Oistrakh Trio (among the few vintage sessions featured). So much to discover here, the comic opera *Der Onkel aus Boston* (with Kate Royal, under Rilling) being an undoubted highlight, though there are curious omissions (the *Konzertstücke*, Opp 113 and 114, for example, and the *Capriccio brilliant*, Op 22, and *Rondo brilliant*, Op 29, both for piano and orchestra). Best represented here are the symphonies, various chamber pieces and the many fine choral works.

A combination of familiar masterpieces and worthwhile repertoire rarities also makes Brilliant Classics' 25-disc miscellany



Russian Chamber Music appealing.

Among the highlights are the complete Tchaikovsky quartets and *Souvenir de Florence* with an augmented Endellion Quartet, performances notable for their combination of drive and delicacy. The *Souvenir* in particular compares with the best from Russia. Prokofiev's two quartets and complete *Visions fugitives* (as arranged for quartet by Sergei Samsonov) are given wildly spontaneous-sounding performances

Kennedy's Four Seasons promotes a punk-like spikiness that fits the prevalent soundbite culture

by the aptly named Quartetto Energie Nove. The violinist Vladimir Ivanov, a very fine player now in his early seventies, features on recordings by the Moscow Trio (Borodin, Glinka, Rachmaninov, Rimsky-Korsakov, Roslavets and Shostakovich), though when it comes to Glinka's Divertimento on themes from Bellini's *La Sonnambula* the performer credits as printed are muddled – but what a delight to hear the *Variations on a Theme by Mozart* for harp (Natalia Shameyeva). I was very taken with the gentle playing of the violinist Daniela Cammarano which graces works by Taneyev and Anton Rubinstein, while the Borodin quartets, Quintet and Piano Quintet are entrusted to the Moscow Quartet, whose performances rather resemble those of their fêted predecessors on disc, the Borodin Quartet. Other works featured are by Glazunov, Arensky, Catoire and Myaskovsky, all played with what seems like intuitive understanding.

The distinguished Belgian violinist and composer **Eugène Ysaÿe** is the subject of an impressive five-disc Tribute which includes numerous works by Ysaÿe himself – most interestingly two substantial and virtually unknown concerto movements played by

Jean-Jacques Kantorow – and masterpieces that were either dedicated to Ysaÿe (the Debussy String Quartet, for example) or closely associated with him. The ill-fated but hugely gifted Guillaume Lekeu (who died the day after his 24th birthday) is represented by his Violin Sonata and a mightily impressive albeit unfinished Piano Quartet. The line-up of players includes the pianist Pavel Kolesnikov (in Chausson's *Concert*) and violinist Augustin Dumay, as well as many less familiar players who give consistently insightful performances. This is a truly fascinating collection.

It seems that an eternity has passed since the early prime of the violinist **Nigel Kennedy** whose 1984 recording of Elgar's Concerto under Vernon Handley – *Gramophone's* Recording of the Year back then – is both tonally pure and heartfelt, while his 1989 account of Vivaldi's *Four Seasons* with the English Chamber Orchestra, although less acerbic than some that have appeared since, promotes a punk-like spikiness that fits the prevalent soundbite culture of pop (try the closing *Presto* of 'Summer'). The rest of this 'Early Years' collection is as varied as it is individual, with rapturous Tchaikovsky and Chausson, a memorable coupling of the Walton Violin and Viola Concertos under André Previn (the latter especially good), Bruch and Mendelssohn concertos and a daring solo album, the Bartók Sonata and Kennedy's own fitfully successful take on motives from Duke Ellington's seminal suite *Black, Brown and Beige* with Alec Dankworth playing double bass. Well worth a listen, especially if you know the original. **G**

THE RECORDINGS

Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy Edition

Hänssler Classic © (56 discs) HC19058

Russian Chamber Music

Brilliant Classics © (25 discs) 95953

A Tribute to Ysaÿe **G**

Fuga Libera © (5) FUG758

Nigel Kennedy: The Early Years 1984-89

Warner Classics © (5) 9029 53557-4

REPLAY

Rob Cowan's monthly survey of historic reissues and archive recordings



Tales of the unexpected

As Peter Quantrill suggested in January's 'Icons' (page 62), the Hungarian-born Austrian conductor **Hans Swarowsky** is something of an unsung hero, having heard Mahler conduct, and Webern (one of Swarowsky's principal teachers) direct Mahler symphonies much as the composer himself might have done. Swarowsky's live January 1963 Berlin broadcast of Mahler's Third Symphony might not be the most polished or the best recorded but he sustains the mood and keeps both the atmosphere and the sense of the great outdoors alive for the work's considerable duration. The outer movements in particular are impressive, the darkening brass response to the opening eight-horn alarms full of menace. The movement's close is unashamedly joyful and although the very beginning of the expressively played second movement is missing, the Scherzo's nightmare close again transports us to darkness and the slow finale is imposingly intense.

Among the many highlights of Profil's 11-CD set (involving orchestras from Vienna, Cologne, Berlin and Prague) is music by Swarowsky's other teacher in music theory, Arnold Schoenberg, most notably *Kol Nidre* and *A Survivor from Warsaw*, both featuring the significant Austrian actor Hans Jaray, partner of the film actors Paula Wessely and Marlene Dietrich. Jaray declaims *Kol Nidre*'s haunting narrative like a charismatic religious elder. Also included are three Haydn symphonies (Nos 70, 93 and 100), Mozart's Piano Concertos Nos 21 and 27 very freely interpreted by Friedrich Gulda (the solo part in the C major's *Andante* jazzily nudged off the bar line), a brilliant performance of Mendelssohn's First Concerto in E flat for two pianos (Orazio Frugoni and Eduard Mrazek), and Mrazek offers a fiery and forceful account of Brahms's B flat Concerto.

Ivry Gitlis is full of temperament in Mendelssohn's Violin Concerto and there are other featured symphonies, Beethoven's *Eroica*, Schubert's *Unfinished* and *Great C* major, an assertive *Grosse Fuge* and programmes devoted to music by Richard and Johann Strauss and Wagner

(including an especially stirring *Tannhäuser* Overture). The *Eroica*'s main attractions are transparency and clear delineation of winds against strings in the first movement's mighty coda, while in Schubert's Ninth the opening *Andante*, taken at a very swift tempo, morphs into the highly mobile *Allegro ma non troppo* with the ease of a seasoned sprinter. Only the *Unfinished* is played with its first-movement exposition repeat intact. The transfers are adequate.

Virtually everything gathered here attests to what Swarowsky's star pupil Claudio Abbado called his 'profound knowledge'. There's plenty more where this came from so please, Profil, let's be having it. In case you don't already know, an imposing complete *Ring* is also available (Hänssler), as are the complete Brahms symphonies (Quadromania).

Eloquence's ongoing promotion of **Karl Münchinger**'s recorded legacy takes a surprising turn with a CD of orchestral works by Liszt and Wagner, the former with the Paris Conservatoire Orchestra, the latter with the Stuttgart Chamber Orchestra augmented by the winds of Ansermet's Suisse Romande Orchestra (a questionable idea in principle – given the variable quality of the Suisse Romande winds – but it works rather well). *Siegfried Idyll* is the sole Wagner piece, a quietly lyrical performance, nicely played, but the Liszt items are exceptional, even in mono sound: the bass drum in *Mazeppa* is especially well captured. Münchinger offers weighty, considered performances that avoid any hint of excessive melodrama, bringing to the pages of these often under-appreciated pieces (in addition to *Mazeppa*, we're offered *Prometheus*, *Hamlet* and the First *Mephisto Waltz*) both a sense of structure and a storyteller's art.

And while we're on the subject of interesting orchestral recordings, it's worth mentioning Warner Classics' 75th birthday tribute to the **Philharmonia Orchestra**, where many of the usual suspects – Karajan, Cantelli, Klemperer (including a couple of electrifying 'first-release' Strauss performances), Furtwängler, Toscanini (the complete Brahms symphony cycle taped at London's Royal Festival Hall), Giulini,

Markevitch et al – are supplemented with CD rarities such as Paul Kletzki's superb rendition of Tchaikovsky's Serenade for Strings, Barber's *Souvenirs* under Efrem Kurtz, Robert Irving conducting Dohnányi's Suite in F sharp minor and an appealing programme of lighter pieces. Also included, a first release of Esa-Pekka Salonen conducting Schoenberg's *Verklärte Nacht*. Jon Tolansky's CD of recorded 'Philharmonia Memories' is a most worthwhile bonus, as are Alan Sanders's excellent booklet notes.

THE RECORDINGS



Hans Swarowsky:
The Conductor
Profil © ⑪ PH18061



Liszt, Wagner
Münchinger
Decca Eloquence
© ELQ482 8427



Philharmonia Orchestra:
Birth of a Legend
Warner Classics © (24 discs)
9029 53495-1

Discovering Rosa Tamarkina

People sometimes comment in passing on my supposed 'wide' knowledge of recordings. 'Not a bit of it,' is my usual response, meaning that what I don't know by far exceeds what's stuffed into my overcrowded memory bank. Take Scribendum's three-disc set **The Art of Rosa Tamarkina**. Who? Never heard of her. In fact, I'd assumed that the beautiful face featured on the box cover was 'one to watch' (as we say in these pages) but, no, Tamarkina, who was once married to Emil Gilels, died in Moscow at the age of 30 almost exactly 70 years ago. According to Wikipedia's fairly informative article (Scribendum provides no biographical notes), 'Tamarkina started appearing



Rosa Tamarkina: a sadly short-lived star pianist

in public at the age of 13, astounding listeners and critics with the maturity of her interpretation, temperament and virtuosity'. The evidence on disc is staggering, most especially the Liszt items (the *Rigoletto* Paraphrase, *Petrarch Sonnet 104* and *Hungarian Rhapsody* No 10), the Sonnet raging with the full force of that 'temperament and virtuosity'. It really has to be heard to be believed. As to the opening of Rachmaninov's Second Concerto (under Nikolai Anosov), yes, the piano initially drowns out the orchestra, but once into its stride the performance proves among the most compelling ever committed to disc. The set opens to a Chopin group, lighting the touchpaper with a highly charged Third Scherzo, the embellished chorale theme both grave and noble. The Fantasy, Op 49, and *Polonaise-fantaisie* are powerful and impassioned, awesomely accurate too. You can actually see the featured performance of Chopin's 'Black Keys' Study on YouTube, though the sound is poor – the least satisfactory recording on the set, in fact. Everything else more than passes muster, including a warmly phrased and at times heroic account of Franck's Violin Sonata where

Tamarkina partners the expressive Marina Kosolupova, and there are performances of the Brahms and Taneyev Piano Quintets with the Bolshoi Theatre Quartet, the Brahms in particular featuring remarkably clean fingerwork (as well as the first movement's sizeable exposition repeat). The final disc opens to a Schubert and Schubert-Liszt sequence, two Impromptus from D899 (the E flat pure filigree) and Liszt's versions of 'Der Müller und der Bach' and 'Erstarrung', both recorded live, sometimes minutely flawed but anguished and full of foreboding. This is a truly great set, and make no mistake. No specific sources are given.

THE RECORDING



The Art of Rosa Tamarkina
Scribendum (M) ③ SC819

Jörg Demus's Schubert

Another wonderful pianist, **Jörg Demus**, who died last April at the age of 90, was probably more famed for his playing of Schubert than of any other composer's work, his recordings of Schubert Lieder – most especially *Winterreise* with Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau – remarkable for their acute sense of mood, movement and colour. DG Eloquence's reissue of Demus's 1958 recordings of both sets of Impromptus, plus the *Moments musicaux* and the *Klavierstücke*, D946, extends the tale already told by Demus the accompanist to solo repertory. His version of the G flat Impromptu from D899 is a model of composure and poise, the use of rubato extremely subtle (as it is elsewhere in the set), his manner of nuancing expressive in the extreme. And while his playing of D899 No 2 is less overtly brilliant than Tamarkina's, it's more appreciative of the music's implied light and shade. The *Moments musicaux* are especially fine, the two F minor pieces in particular, the first quietly playful, the second fiercely assertive, at least initially. The last of the *Moments* (A flat) underlines Demus's principal virtue, namely profound simplicity of vision. He keeps D935 No 3 flowing nicely, with no unwelcome hiatuses between variations, while the dancing F minor piece closes decisively. For me, though, the set's high points are the three late *Klavierstücke*, where Demus anticipates the valedictory spirit he would achieve so vividly a few years later in that fated *Winterreise* recording. Few pianists since have focused the music's forward-looking spirit as successfully as Demus does here:

it's playing you can to return to again and again, never tiring of its haunting yet dramatic effect. Peter Quantrill provides first-rate annotation.

THE RECORDING



Schubert Piano Works
Demus
DG Eloquence
③ ② ELQ484 0777

Bach from the heart

Peter Quantrill also offers authoritative annotation for another revelation of sorts, Bach's six Cello Suites, again recorded in 1958, on this occasion for L'Oiseau-Lyre, by **Jean-Max Clément**, who was at the time principal cellist of the Monte-Carlo Philharmonic. He was also chosen by Thomas Beecham to give the first UK performance of Offenbach's *Concerto militaire*. Listening to Clément play it's easy to understand why Beecham was so impressed, his manner of tonal projection very much on a par with the warmly emotional string playing style that Beecham favoured for his own Royal Philharmonic. Casals is perhaps the nearest point of comparison, meaning the rhythmic freedom, individuality of phrasing, range of dynamics and so on. Take the First Suite, the way Clément eases his way into the Prélude, slowly to start with then gradually picking up the tempo, or the same Suite's Sarabande, where the end of the moment is truly *morendo*, so slow, so quiet, it could easily have been excerpted from a Romantic concerto. The Fifth Suite's celebrated Sarabande is similarly intense and, although also dying to a whisper, sings on a well of vibrant tone beforehand. There are also one or two oddities, for example the way Clément virtually dismisses the second Bourrée in the Fourth Suite out of hand but the Prélude to the Sixth Suite (played on a conventional four-string instrument) has plenty of gusto and so do many of the dance movements elsewhere. I liked this set enormously, its emotional candour, expressive use of portamento, tonal allure (there's plenty of vibrato where Clément feels its use is most appropriate), free spirit and even occasional rough patches. If you're wedded to the HIP camp and easily offended, be warned.

THE RECORDING



Bach Solo Cello Suites
Clément
Decca Eloquence
③ ② ELQ482 8523

Classics RECONSIDERED



Peter Quantrill
and **David Gutman**
mull over the merits
of Jascha Horenstein's
1970 LSO recording
of Mahler's
Third Symphony



Mahler

Symphony No 3 in D minor

Norma Procter; chors; LSO / Jascha Horenstein
Unicorn

In every way this matches the concentration of a live Horenstein performance, and with a work as expansively universal as this, that is a great achievement. The LSO, beautifully recorded, combines its characteristic virtuosity with a degree of dedicated intensity that makes one wonder that it can be the same orchestra which sounds so extrovert and brash under Solti. The sound is very vivid and wide-ranging. Though every section is

faithfully reproduced, the strings are given a comparatively backward balance. One notices this soon after the start when cellos and basses have a series of emphatic entries, triple forte with accent marks on each note of a scale of rising semiquavers as well as the principal notes of the phrase. In addition it is marked 'wild'. Here the result is comparatively tame, not because of the playing but simply because of the balance. Horenstein's interpretation as one would expect is clear-headed and direct. He appreciates that restraint is essential above all in the long intense hymn-like last movement, where any attempt to jump the

gun emotionally ruins Mahler's calculated scheme. Horenstein's restraint is matched only by his unremitting concentration, with complete fidelity to the score over dynamic shading. In the fourth movement Norma Procter sings most beautifully. There is a hint of obtrusive vibrato on some of the sustained notes, but not enough to worry about. The Wandsworth boys have a gloriously bright and lusty tone combined with musical precision, and the women of the Ambrosian Singers are more than a match for their recorded rivals. All told an outstandingly successful issue. **Edward Greenfield** (12/70)

PQ Before Leonard Bernstein came along in the early 1960s and convinced the world at large that he was Mahler reincarnated through a combination of sharp marketing and sheer force of personality, Jascha Horenstein was one of several conductors steadily advancing Mahler's cause. He had been conducting the symphonies ever since he made his professional debut with the First Symphony in the early 1920s – even though he admitted he had never even heard of Mahler until the news broke of his death in 1911.

DG That I didn't know! So many of the early Mahlerians were acolytes or disciples of disciples whereas Wilhelm Furtwängler was the key player in Horenstein's rise to prominence in Weimar Germany. Despite Horenstein's patchy post-war career, his Mahler was seen to matter, in London at least, and his Royal Albert Hall Eighth of March 1959, curtain-raiser for the centenary cycle mounted by the BBC, is still regarded as a game changer (BBC Legends, 12/98; and Pristine Audio). His involvement with the Third was again locally significant.

PQ According to Andrew Porter in *The Musical Times*, Horenstein 'rose to heroic stature' with the Third's first professional concert performance in the UK – given with the LSO in November 1961, now available on Archipel and Pristine Audio. By the time of this studio recording from July 1970 (prefaced in May by another concert performance), heroism had mellowed into a kind of saintliness, not only in the eyes of the public but in the character of his reading too.

DG The project must have been a big deal for the small independent label with which Horenstein enjoyed an Indian summer – his official recording career had been rather hit and miss. I'm aware that Horenstein obsessives often prefer the 1961 radio tape, but it is markedly more urgent only in the first movement and (understandably) scrappier. In the studio, he surprised Deryck Cooke by abandoning the rapt Brucknerian solemnity of his May 1970 concert in favour of more forward movement.

PQ Reviewing the recording in *The Musical Times*, Robert Anderson refers favourably

back to Richard Strauss's mischievous appraisal of the first movement – 'a May Day procession of socialist workers along the Prater' – and goes on to sum up the performance as 'broadly thought out and finely executed'. Just so, and fine as far as it goes, but don't we demand more than that now? Modern scholarship lays stress on the heterogeneous nature of the Third's construction. Light operetta and marching bands jostle cheek by jowl with Beethoven quartets and Nietzsche's thought. In that context, is a harmonious balance between those elements achievable or even desirable?

DG Brits have never been too keen on febrile, disruptive Mahler. The early *Gramophone* notices are respectful, Edward Greenfield (whose extremely long review is cut drastically in the version above) hailing an 'outstandingly successful issue' while hinting at qualities we might find troubling today. I invested pocket money in the purchase of Unicorn's handsome gatefold, but had not returned to the performance in many years. I now hear problems, technical and conceptual. There is some typically forthright LSO playing from leader John



Jascha Horenstein with the LSO, the partnership behind this month's Classics Reconsidered recording

Georgiadis, Dennis Wick on trombone and William Lang on flugelhorn impersonating posthorn, but many goofs that would be patched now. One factor is that Horenstein liked a lot of rehearsal but didn't prioritise surface brilliance. According to his last assistant, Joel Lazar: 'The exceptional unity and continuity that characterised his performances arose from the way he controlled rhythm, harmony, dynamics and tempo so that each individual moment might receive the most vivid characterisation, but the overall line and cumulative effect would not be lost.' Is it just that we're all impatient now?

PQ I don't think so, given the general tendency towards slower tempos in Mahler performances over the past half-century. Horenstein died less than three years later: is hindsight casting too long a shadow if I hear a certain *sub specie mortis* character to the restrained and pulse-led sweep of the first movement? The Third in particular used to come under fire for not behaving like a 'proper' symphony, and Horenstein's reading sounds specifically calculated to assert its status within that canon – with attendant casualties in the way of high contrast and orchestral colour. The violence and variety of the scherzo is flattened out by a classicising, miniaturising quality to both the conducting and the engineering.

DG Some of the issues may not be intrinsic to the performance as such. Whereas every generation seems compelled to undertake a state-of-the-art remastering of Bernstein's 1961 taping (the LP pressings sounded pretty shrill), there's been no comparable recalibration of Horenstein's multitracked recording, just a one-off digital remastering for CD that remains weirdly skewed.

PQ I've been listening (in stereo) to the recording on quadrophonic LPs as well as to the digital remastering. Neither of them passes muster by modern standards, I'd say: backwardly balanced and emaciated strings – this is the engineering and definitely not the playing! – and isolated, sometimes disturbingly spotlighted winds. For much of the performance the symphony resembles Schubert's Octet, and perhaps that says something true about the work which is often overlooked.

DG Yes, the sound is a real puzzle. There are some big names involved too. Producer Harold Lawrence, by then LSO general manager, was formerly with Mercury Records. And Bob Auger was the sound engineer, apparently using the latest Dolby system in Croydon's acoustically plausible Fairfield Halls. I've never heard the penultimate movement with the voices so thrust into the limelight at the expense of the orchestra. Fortunately, the choirs come across as rather impressive, rustic rather than refined. Norma Procter is a bit blunt, though, and her contralto-ish timbre is no longer in vogue.

PQ In fact, the restored Fairfield Halls sound better than ever in 2020! Back in 1965, the composer and provocateur Sorabji remarked that Mahler and Bruckner were being 'killed by kindness' in performance. Who knows what he had in mind, but that's what I think about the reverential but laboured pace of the fifth movement. It's very conscientiously voiced – pedantically so in the bass from around 2'20" – and forwardly sung, as you say. On the strength of this I don't suppose Horenstein would have had any truck with modern scholarly ideas about the movement as a parody of faith.


DG And what do you make of the Nietzsche setting?

PQ It feels like a calculated step back from the pathos of the Second's 'Urlicht' (is that Mahler or Horenstein?), especially when you compare Procter's singing here with her heartfelt account of 'Urlicht' as part of Rafael Kubelík's DG Second. There's an unironised gravity to the reading even before considering the rather plain account of Mahler's *hinaufziehen* bird calls on the cor anglais.

DG Indeed, though I'm not sure anyone was much bothered until Sir Simon Rattle turned those motifs into menacing seagulls a couple of decades later. The finale goes best of all doesn't it? Sir John Barbirolli had just died.

PQ Absolutely: is that partly because the strings belatedly edge into prominence? But Horenstein's leadership has a moving restraint and unselfconscious fluency more recently conjured up in concert by Teodor Currentzis. I like the portamento at around 13'10" – it's a shame there isn't more of it. The coda is pretty much perfect, isn't it? Loud, sonorous, free from exaggeration without falling into the prosaic.

DG The more so given that so many disappoint. Does Rattle still speed up at the end? A conductor like Claudio Abbado is for me too self-conscious, deliberately mixing down the vulgarity (and the drum strokes) with which Bernstein celebrates Mahler's homecoming. Then again, swallowed whole as it must be, I'm not sure Horenstein's 'traditional' reading retains its pre-eminence in a crowded field. British musicians were still relatively unfamiliar with Mahler in 1970 and not necessarily keen to play a symphony lasting longer than anything in the standard orchestral repertoire. So why do I personally prefer Horenstein's Eighth, a 'classic' for all its imprecisions, not to mention what survives of his unambiguously magnificent Bruckner? Is it just nostalgia?

PQ I think the Eighth responds more readily to such lack of ambiguity. There is a noble and lofty tone to this Third – and to much of the best of Horenstein's Mahler – that understandably satisfies many listeners who might recoil both from Bernstein's overt appeal to the emotions and from more modernist-accented readings, even ones as subtle as Abbado's. But the desire for such a tone says more about the listeners than it does about the piece! 

Books



Nigel Simeone enjoys a compelling history of a great orchestra:

'Bratby is particularly interesting on conductors of the CBSO who are not particularly well documented elsewhere'



Jeremy Nicholas reads the memoirs of a pioneering film director:

'Nupen's films seem like exemplars of a golden age – television's appetite for championing classical music has long since waned'

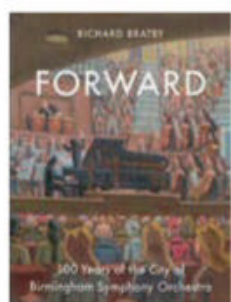
Forward

100 Years of the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra

By Richard Bratby

Elliott & Thompson, HB, 276pp, £25

ISBN 978-1-783-96453-6



Writing the history of an orchestra is a tricky art: finding a satisfying balance between documenting an

ensemble's performing history, describing its place in the life of a city and exploring some of its personalities. In the case of the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra (until 1948 simply 'City of Birmingham Orchestra'), there's a magnificent story to tell, including the tenures of some very distinguished conductors, from Adrian Boult in the 1920s to Simon Rattle in the 1980s and '90s and, most recently, Andris Nelsons and Mirga Gražinytė-Tyla. But this was also an orchestra with plenty of innovations to its name: it gave the first concerts specially for children (there's a charming illustration of a programme from 1924 on page 50) and it was the first to set up an education department. Throughout the 19th century, Birmingham had been an important musical centre (the premieres of Mendelssohn's *Elijah*, Dvořák's *Spectre's Bride* and Elgar's *Dream of Gerontius* were all given at the Birmingham Triennial Festival), but the city had no permanent orchestra. Elgar was among the first musicians to campaign for one, and it was eventually thanks to the tenacious endeavours of his friend Granville Bantock that this finally became a reality in 1920.

Richard Bratby's *Forward* is a celebration of the orchestra's centenary, but, more than that, it is an engrossing account of Birmingham's musical life over the past 100 years. Bratby combines an elegant prose style with a fine eye for significant details. He's particularly interesting on conductors of the CBSO who are not particularly well documented elsewhere – the likes of Leslie

Heward, George Weldon and Hugo Rignold – and he provides a fascinating account of Andrzej Panufnik's time with the orchestra, as well as the work of his immediate predecessor Rudolf Schwarz. The story of Louis Frémaux's sudden departure in 1978 (as Bratby puts it, 'the CBSO ... lost both a general manager and a chief conductor in the course of a weekend') has tended to overshadow his achievements with the orchestra, but the whole of his near-decade with the CBSO is explored sympathetically and due credit is given for their recordings (my own favourite among them is Frémaux's account of Walton's *Coronation Te Deum* which also shows off the CBSO chorus – founded by Frémaux in 1973 – to impressive effect). The arrival of Simon Rattle saw not only the standard of playing reach new heights of sensitivity and flexibility but also a vast expansion of the repertoire. One of Bratby's chapters is called 'Ten Pieces from a Revolution', discussing the CBSO's performances of pieces such as Messiaen's *Turangalila-Symphonie*, Turnage's *Three Screaming Popes*, Szymanowski's *King Roger* and Mahler's Second Symphony (a work Rattle and the CBSO often did together, and the one chosen for the official opening concert of the new Symphony Hall in 1991).

One of the most impressive features of this book is the way in which Bratby interweaves material from interviews with his own narrative: testimony from players, conductors, administrators and others – all giving the text a vitality that orchestral histories often lack. Andris Nelsons made a big impact with the orchestra when he gave a trial concert in 2007. Sheila Clarke, one of the players, recalled that 'there were only about a hundred people in the hall, and yet he conducted as if there were two thousand people there ... it just brought us all alive'. She adds that the orchestra was on the point of approaching Gustavo Dudamel, but he had already been hired by the Gothenburg Symphony Orchestra: 'Thank goodness ... he was so like Rattle that it wouldn't have worked in the end.' Nelsons was popular with the players and

the public – and his programmes included more opera than those of his predecessors – but plans to remain at Birmingham at the same time as taking on the music directorship in Boston turned out to be unworkable. Stephen Maddock, the orchestra's chief executive, makes a persuasive argument against such an arrangement: 'I didn't want to get to a situation where, yes, Andris was going to do it, but all we would end up with was six or eight weeks ... Even when our conductors have had another job going, the CBSO has always been number one. In the end, there were no hard feelings about it at all.' Nelsons's successor, Mirga Gražinytė-Tyla, has already stamped her personality on the orchestra, and also shown a Rattle-like flair for brilliant programming: in short, the CBSO remains in very fine shape and still plays, as Gražinytė-Tyla herself says, with a rare commitment and enthusiasm, 'as if they were a youth orchestra'. *Forward* is very reasonably priced, especially as it includes a great many well-chosen illustrations, several in colour, providing an excellent complement to Bratby's thoroughly engaging text.

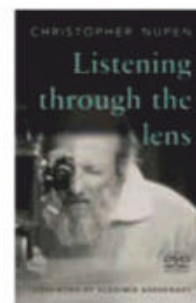
Nigel Simeone

Listening Through the Lens

By Christopher Nupen

Kahn & Averill, HB, 256pp, £30

ISBN 978-0-995-75742-4



For the uninitiated, Christopher Nupen's films opened a door into a new world. For classical music

lovers they were manna from heaven. Here were great musicians not just being filmed in performance but rehearsing, messing about, having a laugh and talking about their art in a way that had not been done before – or, if so, only rarely. Among those featured by Allegro Films, the company that Nupen founded in 1968, were Andrés Segovia, Jacqueline du Pré,



The current Music Director of the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, Mirga Gražinyte-Tyla has already stamped her personality on the organisation

Daniel Barenboim, Pinchas Zukerman, Zubin Mehta, Vladimir Ashkenazy, Itzhak Perlman, Nathan Milstein, Isaac Stern, Murray Perahia, Plácido Domingo, Gidon Kremer and Evgeny Kissin. The composers he has made films about include Respighi, Brahms, Paganini, Bizet, Schubert and Tchaikovsky, as well as the award-winning *We Want the Light* (about the relationship between the Jews and German music) and *Everything is a Present* (a portrait of 106-year-old Alice Sommer Herz).

Looking back now, Nupen's films seem like exemplars of a golden age, for television's appetite for championing classical music and its exponents has long since waned. It is quite scandalous, but weeks can go by without a single classical music programme being broadcast on any BBC television channel. Rock, pop, jazz, folk, world music – yes. Not classical. It was at Nupen's insistence, in the face of BBC naysayers, that the two disciplines of music performance and documentary could be combined. The formation of Allegro Films happily coincided with the invention of the first lightweight silent 16mm cameras, making it much easier to film musical performers in their natural environment – in rehearsal rooms, on trains, in their homes – rather than being confined to the more formal environs of the studio or concert hall. As importantly, Nupen befriended many of those musicians he filmed. They liked him. They trusted him. The results of these relationships speak for themselves in films that have

not only stood the test of time but which are now valuable historic documents. We would have had many more, Nupen reveals: *Kol Nidrei*, and both of Brahms's cello sonatas with du Pré and Barenboim, the Brahms Clarinet Trio with the two of them and Gervase de Peyer, Schubert's *Great C* major Symphony conducted by Barenboim, and a New Year's Eve Mozart concert which included Ashkenazy, Fou Ts'ong and Barenboim in the Concerto for three pianos. The tapes of all these were erased by the BBC, the latter concert wiped to re-use for a gardening programme.

Listening Through the Lens is Nupen's account of how he made his films and a fascinating tale it proves to be of luck, trial and error, and innate talent. It is also the South African-born director's autobiography and there are some surprising revelations early on. Nupen was clearly something of a swordsman in his younger days. He reports that a brief fling with the dancer Maggie Hill (then living with the choreographer Kenneth MacMillan) left her applauding his 'seven times in a night' success. Shortly afterwards he embarks on a full-blown affair with the great opera diva Lotte Lehmann, then in her sixties and some 40 years older than himself. Gulp. Pause for breath. Other women play a central role in his life, most notably his first wife (and collaborator) Diana, who died so tragically young from breast cancer at the age of 39, and his second and present wife, Caroline. Might

he also have been slightly in love with du Pré? He made no fewer than five film portraits of 'Smiley', as he called her (she called him 'Kitty'), as well as the iconic films of her playing the Elgar Concerto and the *Trout* (with Barenboim, Perlman, Zukerman and Mehta), probably the most frequently broadcast classical music documentary of all time.

Nupen had the good fortune to be in the right place at the right time. He was championed early on in his career by a great radio producer, Laurence Gilliam, and then by the indomitable Huw Wheldon ('the best man that BBC television ever had' opines Nupen, a verdict with which many would concur). And it is Wheldon whom Nupen quotes at a conference in Chicago explaining the success of the BBC's arts programming in that era. Perhaps someone now working at the BBC might read this and ponder: 'The only thing to do, not the *best* thing to do, but the *only* thing to do, is to find talented people and then let them have their heads. You will either have success or you will have failure or perhaps something in between, but if you interfere you are certain to land yourself with mediocrity.' That is why Nupen's work is so successful: he was left to flourish or fail on his own merits.

Elegantly written with a good selection of photographs and a filmography, the book comes with a short DVD of brief extracts from 13 Nupen films made between 1968 and 2004. **Jeremy Nicholas**

THE GRAMOPHONE COLLECTION

Beethoven's Ninth Symphony

Richard Osborne traces the evolution of this great work over nearly a century of recordings

No symphony has been more widely discussed, or been a greater divider of musical opinion, than Beethoven's Ninth. One problem has been the difficulties the work presents to performers; another is the very nature of the symphony. 'We shall never make head or tail of the Ninth Symphony until we treat it as a law unto itself,' wrote Sir Donald Tovey in *Essays in Musical Analysis*, published in 1935. That at least admitted of a solution. Not so Professor Nicholas Cook, who entitled the final chapter of his superb 1993 Cambridge Handbook on the piece 'Beyond Interpretation?'. With that question in mind, it's perhaps as well to hang on to our hats; this can be no ordinary collectors' guide.

The earliest recommendable recording, happily still extant, is the one **Felix Weingartner** made with the Vienna Philharmonic for English Columbia in 1935. Born in Austro-Hungary in 1863, Weingartner had been educated by a generation of musicians – Liszt and Wagner prime among them – who had witnessed at first hand the evolution of the Ninth as a performable work. It had been an arduous journey, from the shambles of the earliest performances in 1824–26, through years of painstaking bar-by-bar rehearsal by the pioneering French conductor François-Antoine Habeneck, to an era of growing mastery and understanding in the period between Palm Sunday 1846, when Wagner first conducted the symphony, and 1912, when Heinrich Schenker published his *Die neunte Sinfonie*, a book, prodigious in its reach, that analysed the music, its problems in performance and its attendant literature.

With so much to absorb, it was as well that Weingartner was not only a fine conductor but a master of assimilation. Collectors who bought his 1935 recording must have thought themselves in seventh heaven, and probably remained so until the 1950s when new technologies rendered it temporarily redundant. By then, however, the Ninth was no longer quite what it once had been.

A VERY GERMAN SYMPHONY

The Ninth is the most German of Beethoven's symphonies. The text of the finale, carefully assembled from lines in Schiller's famous ode, indicates as much. The symphony's dedicatee was German; and, had Beethoven had his way, its premiere would have been in Berlin, not in Rossini-obsessed Vienna. And herein lies a problem. Though the First World War had left the Ninth largely unscathed, the Second had not. The work had long been prey to ideologies of differing inclinations but none proved more pernicious than that which appeared in the 1930s in Germany itself, where it was accorded special status.

English claims on the Ninth (or *Choral* as it's been called here since its earliest performances) are based on nothing more than the £50 donation which triggered its formal commission in December 1822. As Tovey pointed out, the English have never been all that keen on the sublime, which may explain why the Ninth has never been a particularly happy hunting-ground for British conductors. Such, however, was the early power of British and American record companies that Weingartner's 1926 London recording and **Leopold Stokowski's** 1934 Philadelphia version both had the finale sung in English, and poorly translated English at that. (Stokowski's 1967 London remake has

the finale in German, albeit with the performers spread across several acres by Decca's CinemaScope-style Phase 4 sound.) Weingartner's 1935 Vienna account is in German but, pre-*Anschluss*, this British-made recording was insufficiently German for the Nazis. So it was that Eugen Jochum and, later, **Karl Böhm** (a wonderful *Fidelio* conductor whose several recordings of the Ninth are strangely pedestrian) were commissioned to make recordings that could be marketed as *echt*-Deutsch.

FURTWÄNGLER'S DILEMMA

But what of **Wilhelm Furtwängler**? A master of the Wagner-Beethoven repertory and a pupil of Heinrich Schenker, he if anyone was the Keeper of the Seal where the Ninth Symphony was concerned. So how did he deal with the Ninth during a time of war, and a German-induced war at that? With a mixture of panic and anger, it would seem, if his 1942 Berlin performance (much admired in some quarters) is anything to go by. No doubt the performance, given under the auspices of the Nazis' bizarrely named cultural wing 'Strength through Joy', was a *cri de coeur*, a protest even. What emerges, however, sounds like pure hysteria.

The justly famous performance Furtwängler conducted at the reopening



PHOTOGRAPHY: HISTORY AND ART COLLECTION/ALAMY
STOCK PHOTO

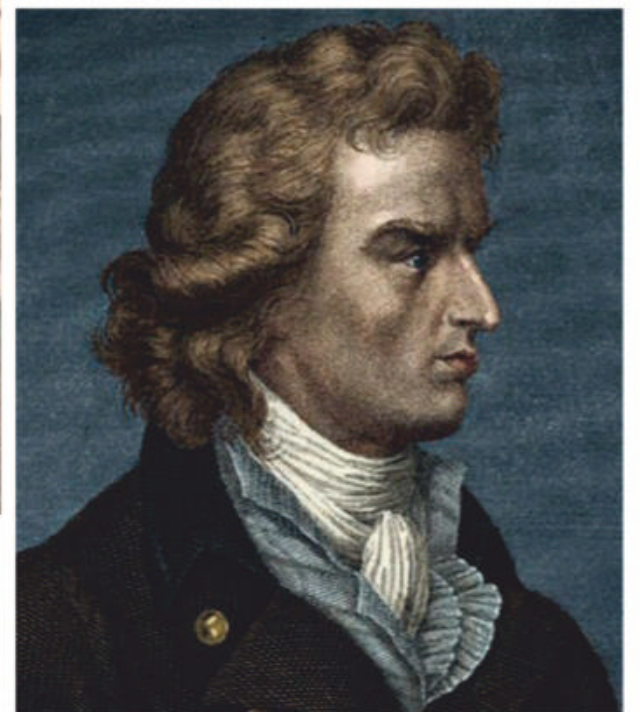


A 19th-century print depicting the premiere of the Ninth; and Schiller, author of the famous ode

of the Bayreuth Festival in July 1951 is the very reverse. It speaks of tragedy giving way to what Beethoven's great contemporary Wordsworth called 'joy in the widest commonalty spread'. In Bayreuth, a stupendous account of the tragic first movement gives way to a joyous rendering of the second movement's springtime revel and the deeper joy of the *adagio*-with-variations which follows (albeit with Furtwängler's unaccelerated treatment

of the variations occasionally straining the patience even of these players). Here are echoes of Beethoven's *Pastoral* Symphony, that earlier ode to joy, not least in the pastoral perfection of the second-movement Trio where Furtwängler's first oboe, clearly a piper to the gods, sounds as if he's just strolled down from Mount Olympus.

The 1951 Bayreuth performance wasn't released until after Furtwängler's death in



1954. What few knew at the time was that EMI producer Walter Legge had tidied the thing up with inserts from rehearsal tapes. It was not until 2008 that the original Bavarian Radio recording was unearthed and transferred to CD by Orfeo. This, rather than the Legge, is the one to have.

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When Furtwängler's arch-rival **Arturo Toscanini** conducted the symphony in London in 1939, Neville Cardus suggested that the performance was too much an exercise in orchestral virtuosity, not least in the tragic first movement where the conducting rarely peered beneath the surface. This was not a popular view, either then or at the time of Toscanini's last and finest Ninth, recorded live in New York's Carnegie Hall in 1952. 'Nowhere, perhaps, is Toscanini's genius more apparent than in this work,' wrote Edward Sackville-West in the 1955 edition of *The Record Guide*. 'At the age of 85 he had lost none of the concentration and energy which he always brought to it; he sweeps irresistibly forward, as though in a single fierce creative impulse.'

The reading is one of the great high-wire acts in the history of conducting, one that gives a terrific impression of the piece while showing minimal regard for the way Beethoven conceived and shaped it, the first movement in particular. Still, Toscanini brought it off in a way no other similarly minded Italian has.

A PROBLEMATIC MOVEMENT

The problem with the first movement is that, defying precedent, it offers no clear narrative. Sonata form charts a course towards a home port, says Ralph Vaughan Williams in his great essay on the symphony, but here there is none – merely a complex network of themes on which we are invited to meditate. One unnamed 19th-century Russian put it well when he likened the movement to 'a gigantic tree, whose branches, reaching towards the earth, have taken root and formed a forest round their forebear'. The late Deryck Cooke went as far as to see the thematic web spun by Beethoven as a precursor of Wagnerian music-drama.

I know of no commentator of repute who would disagree with Vaughan Williams's analysis. How is it, then, that so many conductors are intent on imposing on the music some form of progressive narrative? Convenience, I guess, both for themselves



An approach rooted in the German tradition: Herbert von Karajan with the Berlin Philharmonic

and their hard-pressed orchestras. That and a continuing faith in metronome marks. By 1824 Beethoven's practical skills as a conductor were virtually non-existent. Why, then, prefer Beethoven's (very fast) metronome suggestion to the carefully considered, if somewhat convoluted written instruction *Allegro ma non troppo, e un poco maestoso* which appears at the head of the autograph manuscript? Given the addition of the words *un poco maestoso* to the already qualifying *ma non troppo*, this is plainly no ordinary *allegro* in 2/4 time.

The younger Beethoven's manner of conducting, his contemporary Ignaz von Seyfried tells us, demanded 'great exactitude in the manner of expression, minute nuances, the balance between light

and shade, as well as an effective *tempo rubato*', which is pretty well word for word what Wagner and Schenker advocated for the direction of this multifaceted first movement – a movement (let us not forget) that appears out of nowhere, without harmony and with no sense of forward propulsion until a rock face looms out of the mist at bar 17.

Toscanini has two tempos for the movement; crotchet=76 to get the show on the road, accelerating to Beethoven's prescribed 88 as the excitement gathers. It works for him, though less well for fellow Italians such as **Riccardo Chailly**, dazzling as the Leipzig playing is, or **Giovanni Antonini**, whose recent period-instrument account of the Ninth, like **John Eliot Gardiner's** 1992

A SENSE OF PERIOD

COE / Nikolaus Harnoncourt

Teldec © 5 0927 49768-2

Though the Ninth Symphony is beyond the pale of period performance, no one has



managed to historicise it more skilfully or more effectively within the context of an expertly directed contemporary performance than Nikolaus Harnoncourt.

VISION WITH PURPOSE

Philh Orch / Otto Klemperer

Warner Classics © 2435 66797-5

Klemperer's performance has the feel of an utterance by the prophet who brought the



tablets down from the mountain. This 1957 Philharmonia recording is an awe-inspiring experience powerfully propelled by an awe-inspiring musician.

THE COMPLETE PICTURE

BPO / Herbert von Karajan

EuroArts © DVD 207 2408

A matchless visualisation of the inner workings of the Ninth, Humphrey Burton's



film is a historically important record of the Berlin Philharmonic in its third great golden age playing the symphony under one of its most informed and dedicated exponents.



Awe-inspiring: Otto Klemperer, whose 1957 Philharmonia recording is one of the great Ninths

equivalent, is not without merit. George Szell, implausibly, has just one tempo, etched out at a steady crotchet=72.

The kind of speeds Beethoven's written instruction suggest are in the region of 72-76. It is this which some of the best interpreters of the Ninth – Weingartner, Bruno Walter, Erich Kleiber, Kurt Masur – use as a general reference point. That pulse is varied but never quite as freely as it is by Klemperer, Karajan, Harnoncourt or, indeed, the altogether slower Furtwängler who was, and remains, *sui generis* where the realisation of the tragic import of the movement is concerned. But, then, we don't actually hear Furtwängler's tempos. We are too busy listening to the music.

A too *maestoso* approach, I should add, is as detrimental to the unfolding of the music as an over-quick one. Witness **Georg Solti** in his grand and frequently becalmed 1972 Chicago Ninth, both recordings directed by **Carlo Maria Giulini**, and **Christian Thielemann**, filmed and recorded with the Vienna Philharmonic in 2012, in a reading, drawn from deep within the Wagner tradition, that is otherwise rich in interest.

For the British companies who ruled the roost in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War, Vienna remained the place to go to record the Ninth: Karajan in 1947, **Erich Kleiber** in

a typically well-articulated performance for Decca in 1952. Decca also returned to Vienna in the mid-1960s to record with **Hans Schmidt-Isserstedt** a cycle that won favour with collectors looking for a return to Weingartner's unassuming excellence. Schmidt-Isserstedt's Ninth was also easy on the pocket, as Decca fitted 68 minutes of stereophonic sound on to a single LP. This involved removing repeats from the second movement's sonata-form exposition, a commonplace omission in the days of 78s, though one to which Karajan made an unwelcome return in his four-sided late-1970s LP set.

KARAJAN AND BRUNO WALTER

There are five studio recordings of the Ninth conducted by **Herbert von Karajan**, alongside three DVDs and more than a dozen off-air recordings. Here the 1959 New York Philharmonic performance (a CBS radio transmission currently available on Archipel) is of particular interest; and not only because of the close interest taken in Karajan's rehearsals and three Carnegie Hall concerts by Leonard Bernstein who, somewhat to Karajan's annoyance, promptly made a documentary about the symphony on the back of his visit.

'Brimming with vitality and compassion, combining an awareness of tradition with a strong feeling of passionate involvement'

was how Howard Taubman described the performance in *The New York Times*. And he was right. Karajan's approach to the symphony was rooted in the German tradition, as you might expect of a musician who was a Schenker pupil at one remove, but also revealed a close interest in Toscanini's unique technical mastery of the piece. (*Gramophone's* William Mann was amazed to see that Karajan had the Toscanini LPs in the studio during the recording of the finale of his now legendary 1962 Berlin version.) As with most successful interpreters of the Ninth, Karajan had weighed and formulated his ideas early. In 1949 the London *Times* described an ill-attended Royal Albert Hall performance directed by him as 'breathtaking', not because of any particular dramatic or philosophical bias but because of the way the work's many elements had been drawn together to create that all-important fourth dimension, 'compact musical integrity'.

Here proportionality is key, which is why Karajan's Ninth was always closer to Weingartner's or **Bruno Walter's** than to the more individualistic readings of Furtwängler, Klemperer and Toscanini. 'Our idea is to let music speak for itself; we must neither distort it by a perfervid [over-ardent] execution, nor prejudice its effectiveness by a lack of warmth,' writes Walter in his book *Of Music and Music-Making*.

Walter himself was a superb exponent of the symphony's three instrumental movements, more particularly the awe-inspiring first movement and the difficult-to-judge third from which, eschewing both rush and pretence, he conjures a mood of deep serenity. He was also a fine exponent of the finale, though, sadly, both his commercial sets had the choral section recorded in a separate location with American choirs that were never entirely at ease with the challenges, technical and linguistic, the music presents. Not that Walter is the only one to be poorly served by his choirs. Among conductors of note, Günter Wand, Mariss Jansons and Osmo Vänskä (the list could go on) satisfy in the first three movements, only to disappoint in the fourth.

Karajan's regular choir was the Wiener Singverein, of which he was appointed conductor for life in 1950. They are at their freshest in his 1955 EMI Vienna recording with the Philharmonia Orchestra and the 1962 Berlin account, which, not without reason, has become the most collected of the Karajan Ninths. It is a superb performance, with a recording that has long been recognised by those in the



Concentration and energy: Arturo Toscanini, the finest Italian conductor of the work

trade as a model of refined naturalness. But, then, EMI's 1955 Musikverein recording was very fine too. What was not so fine was EMI pressing technology, which explains why half a lifetime would pass before expert digital remastering revealed just how good the sound quality was, both on this and on the Philharmonia Orchestra's 1957 recording under Klemperer.

OTTO KLEMPERER

The very name **Otto Klemperer** inspires awe. As with Weingartner, this is a classicist's Ninth, albeit on a far grander scale. Tempos, subtly adjusted, are broader than the norm, except in the slow movement where Klemperer respects the character of a meditation that is cast in the form of a theme (or themes) and variations. Yet thanks to open textures, helped in part by the freshness and point of the Philharmonia's wind- and brass-playing (a feature also of the 1955 Karajan performance), and the characteristic 'spring' Klemperer brings to the heaviest tread, nothing is laboured, nothing hangs fire. Klemperer also had at his disposal one of the few English choirs capable of doing justice to the Ninth: the specially recruited Philharmonia Chorus, assembled by Legge and trained by Wilhelm Pitz, Furtwängler's chorusmaster in Bayreuth and Karajan's former confederate in

Aachen. Have no doubt, this is one of the great Beethoven Ninths.

There was much excitement in the year 2000 when Testament released a 1957 concert performance of the symphony that had been conducted by Klemperer at the same time as the studio recording. It's quicker; yet it now sounds oddly tired by comparison, with (as was noted at the time) the complete Festival Hall cycle of symphonies and piano concertos evidently taking its toll on Klemperer. With the reprocessed studio recording now sounding so well, there can be no doubt which is the more collectible version.

For those who want a comparably 'German' Ninth, though on a slightly less intimidating scale than Klemperer's, **Kurt Masur's** 1974 Philips recording with the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra wears its years well. He and his orchestra are a class act where the notes are concerned. As for Masur himself, he knows the work technically, and spiritually from within, as any conductor must.

NO GOING BACK

In the late 1980s, with the sale of traditional accounts of the Ninth falling away and even the tradition itself being questioned, there appeared a rush of recordings on period instruments. The great merit of **Roger Norrington's** Beethoven cycle with

the London Classical Players was the remarkable quality of the playing of the old instruments, something others who moved into the field – Roy Goodman's Hanover Band and Christopher Hogwood's Academy of Ancient Music – were unable to match, not least in a work as fraught with difficulty as the Ninth. Unfortunately, Norrington, who had not previously been in the habit of mistaking windmills for an advancing army, made the somewhat quixotic claim that the Ninth belonged to 'the humane quicksilver thought-world of the Classical Period whose greatest progeny this is'. Worse, he made at least one decidedly eccentric call on a disputed metronome, giving the zing-boom soldier's song midway through the finale a slow, almost dirge-like quality, after which the fugato that follows sounds as if it's running with the handbrake on.

Several of the symphony's metronome marks make minimal sense, though only one is impossible. We know from the Conversation Books that Beethoven's nephew Carl failed to record the speed Beethoven barked out for the second movement's pastoral Trio, simply logging it with same number as the opening section. Jonathan Del Mar's 1996 Bärenreiter Edition leaves the entry blank (explaining the background in the separately published Critical Commentary). But, then, why would anyone mistake the tempo – as many conductors do, dashing through the music as one might dash through the *Tritsch-Tratsch Polka* – when as Vaughan Williams observed 'wise conductors obey neither marking [semibreve or minim=116] but take a middle road'?

There would be no serious contender for the prize of the best 'historically aware' Ninth were it not for **Nikolaus Harnoncourt**, whose sonically imaginative 1991 Teldec performance with the Chamber Orchestra of Europe uses mainly modern ensemble instruments purposefully directed along established lines, albeit with a keen sense of how the sacred music of Beethoven's era would generally be treated. No account of the Ninth can be taken seriously if it fails to do justice to the work's spiritual aspect. Harnoncourt, unsurprisingly, very much does.

That spiritual core comes two-thirds of the way through the finale with the cry 'Seid umschlungen, Millionen!', followed at 'Ihr stürzt nieder?' by hushed voices over divided violas. For Tovey it is Beethoven showing 'exactly the Palestrina instinct for the expression of awe, mystery, and infinity, in terms of pure concord and subtle intermixture of key'. There are those nowadays who affect to hear only 'cosmic emptiness' here. Vaughan Williams

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thought differently: ‘Never has the mystery of the universe been so portrayed.’ Anyone whose set of Karajan’s 1962 Berlin Ninth comes complete with extracts from his rehearsal of the last movement will know just how that sense of mystery is wrought.

BERLIN AND VIENNA AGAIN

At the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 the Ninth suffered a further ideological shift as the word ‘joy’, descriptive of one of the most enduring and life-enhancing of human emotions, was traded for ‘freedom’, a political buzzword that has always been notoriously difficult to define. This was for a Christmas Day celebration in Berlin’s Schauspielhaus conducted by an ailing and emotional **Leonard Bernstein**. With Bernstein, as the DVD reveals, in full ‘Stations of the Cross’ mode, the slow movement’s first 24 bars last an agonising four minutes.

Bernstein, whose 1960 New York recording of the *Missa solennis* had been a revelation, possessed an instinctive feel for the Ninth as sacred rite. This is realised to poor effect in his under-resourced 1965 New York recording but his live 1979 Deutsche Grammophon recording with the Vienna Philharmonic is another matter. Here is a great performance, not only of the finale, but of the three purely instrumental movements. The reading is finely shaped – Bruno Walter’s or Karajan’s New York performances could well have been the template – but as always with




Furtwängler: deeply versed in the music itself

Bernstein there are things here that are thrillingly his own. Meanwhile, the old Berlin-Vienna rivalries have continued down the years. Sadly, there is no Ninth from **Claudio Abbado**’s 2001 Rome cycle with the Berlin Philharmonic. That said, **Simon Rattle**’s 2015 Berlin Ninth more than compensates. Rattle has pondered the work for many a long year. If his 2002 Vienna recording falls foul of a vain attempt to marry old-school German Beethoven with newfangled period practice – not to mention the bizarre decision to fly in for














































the occasion a none too well-prepared English choir – the later Berlin recording makes no such errors. External influences have been absorbed into a reading that is now indisputably Rattle’s own; the Berliners, as always, play like gods, and with decent soloists and the excellent Berlin Radio Choir there is nothing to frighten the horses other than a barked ‘Brüder!’, a Rattle-Halsey trademark, at bar 748.

THE NINTH ON FILM

Few collectors, I imagine, want to watch the Ninth Symphony, though students of conducting, and of the symphony itself, might care to track down a grainy black-and-white 1948 telecast of Toscanini directing his NBC forces. With the cameras fixed exclusively on Toscanini, what we have is a masterclass in the conductor’s craft, selflessly, unsparingly deployed: the beat continuous, with everything coming from the stick, the sweep and angling of the right hand, the face and the eyes. Extreme concentration is the key, from which flows the gathering of the music’s many sections into what Toscanini biographer BH Haggin has called ‘a single progression from one dazzling sublimity to the next’.

That telecast can carry no general recommendation. What can is the film Humphrey Burton was invited to make of a 1977 New Year’s Eve Berlin performance of the Ninth conducted by Karajan, whose direction of the symphony is another masterclass in the conductor’s craft selflessly deployed, as well as being an exemplary unfolding of the German tradition of playing it. Unlike Karajan’s own kitsch (some would say high camp) filmed realisations of the Ninth, Burton’s is an immaculately crafted documentary. The Ninth is the work that created the need for the modern conductor. In Burton’s film both ear and eye are presented with as complete an impression of the symphony’s inner workings, and the extraordinary business of its realisation in performance, as any of us could hope to see. And the finale is a joy. 

SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

RECORDING DATE / ARTISTS		RECORD COMPANY (REVIEW DATE)
1935	VPO / Weingartner	Naxos  8 110863 (11/35 ^R)
1951	Bayreuth Fest Orch / Furtwängler	Orfeo  C754 081B (8/08)
1952	VPO / E Kleiber	Archipel  ARPCD0077 (10/52 ^R)
1952	NBC SO / Toscanini	RCA  6 19075 96477-2 (4/53 ^R)
1955	Philh Orch / Karajan	Warner Classics  M 2564 60903-0 (11/56 ^R)
1957	Philh Orch / Klemperer	Warner Classics  M  2435 66797-5; EMI  10 404275-2 (11/58 ^R)
1959	Columbia SO / Walter	Sony Classical  S  7 88875 12391-2 (11/60 ^R)
1962	BPO / Karajan	DG  B  447 401-2GOR (2/63 ^R)
1965	VPO / Schmidt-Isserstedt	Decca  B  480 7044 (9/66 ^R)
1967	LSO / Stokowski	Decca  M  478 8336 (10/70 ^R)
1970	VPO / Böhm	DG Eloquence  M ELQ463 197-2 (11/72 ^R)
1972	Chicago SO / Solti	Decca  B  483 3093 (11/72 ^R)
1974	Leipzig Gewandhaus Orch / Masur	Pentatone  F  PTC5186 146 (9/75 ^R)
1977	BPO / Karajan	EuroArts  F  DVD 207 2408
1979	VPO / Bernstein	DG  M  6  (5 + ) 479 7708GM6 (3/80 ^R)
1987	London Classical Plyrs / Norrington	Erato  S  562490-2 (10/87 ^R)
1989-90	BPO / Giulini	DG  M  427 655-2GH (1/91)
1991	COE / Harnoncourt	Teldec  S  5 0927 49768-2 (11/91 ^R)
1992	Orch Révolutionnaire et Romantique / Gardiner	Archiv  S  5 477 8643AB5 (11/94 ^R)
2000	BPO / Abbado	DG  F 471 491-2GH (11/08)
2008	Leipzig Gewandhaus Orch / Chailly	Decca  F 478 3497 (A/11 ^R)
2010	VPO / Thielemann	C Major  F  DVD 737808;  F  737904 (4/12 ^R)
2015	BPO / Rattle	Berliner Philharmoniker  M  5  BPHR160093 (6/16 ^R)
2016	Basel CO / Antonini	Sony Classical  F 19075 87096-2 (1/19)

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conductor deeply versed in the music itself, as well as the 19th-century German culture from which it sprang and which later sustained it.

PERFORMANCES & EVENTS

Presenting live concert and opera performances from around the world and reviews of archived music-making available online to stream where you want, when you want

Konzerthaus, Dortmund & Takt1

March 21

This Dortmund visit from the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra under **Mirga Gražinytė-Tyla** looks very much worth catching online. Opening the programme is *De Profundis* of 1998 by Gražinytė-Tyla's fellow Lithuanian, Raminta Šerkšnytė. Next up is Tchaikovsky's Piano Concerto No 1, with **Gabriela Montero**. The concert concludes with Brahms's Symphony No 3.

takt1.com; konzerthaus-dortmund.de

Palau de la Música Catalana, Barcelona & online (free to view)

March 21 – April 1

Barcelona's **Maria Canals International Music Competition** is open to pianists this year, and the prizes they're competing for include a recital tour of China, and a top cash award of €25,000. Competition events are broadcast live online, and on-demand videos of each round on the website within hours after each session. Supporting the finals at Barcelona's Palau de la Música's Sala de Concerts is the National Youth Orchestra of Catalonia (JONC). mariacanal.org

TivoliVrendenburg, Utrecht & online (free to view)

March 16-28

This year's **International Franz Liszt Piano Competition** celebrates Beethoven 250 with its first ever themed edition: Beethoven seen through the eyes of Liszt, with Leslie Howard among its judges. If you're reading this hot off the press then you can catch the chamber rounds live, for which the pianists are partnered by violinist **Barnabás Keleman** and cellist **Maja Bogdanovic**. Also the transcription rounds. If it's taken you a few days to reach these pages then things will really be hotting up, with the solo finals taking place on March 25, and the concerto finals on March 28. The latter are likely to be a particularly good show, because they're accompanied by the Netherlands Radio PO under **Otto Tausk**. liszt.nl; facebook.com/Liszt.Competition; youtube.com/lisztcompetition

Jerome L. Greene Space, New York & WQXR (free to view)

March 25

Since 1976, New York Lincoln Center's Avery Fisher Artist Program has been awarding up to five **Avery Fisher Career Grants** each year. Worth \$25,000 each, they're designed to give

ARCHIVE OPERA REVIEW

Kirill Petrenko conducts a young orchestra and chorus in *Suor Angelica*



Puccini

Kirill Petrenko's tenure at the Berlin Philharmonic is now fully underway, and alongside a trio of heavyweight programmes early this year he conducted his first performance as part of the orchestra's education programme.

This *Suor Angelica* features a young cast and orchestra drawn from all four corners of the globe, as well as the Vocal Heroes children's choir. Nicola Hümpel's minimalist staging offers additional choreography – a couple of dancers mix with the singers – and projection, as well as an extended prologue, to which pianist Matan Porat provides distantly Puccinian accompaniment. There's more time, then, to present the members of the

convent; both their individual characters and their strength as a unit are emphasised. They gather round Angelica in solidarity as she confronts the Zia Principessa (a stern cameo from veteran mezzo Katarina Dalayman) and one powerful moment has them address us briefly in their respective native languages – a gesture that conveys a strong political message too.

Though there's occasional distracting busyness, there's no mistaking Ann Toomey's sincerity and vocal promise as Angelica, and the dramatic commitment of the whole cast. And it's all brought together with a characteristic mixture of modesty and fierce focus by Petrenko to pack a big emotional punch. **Hugo Shirley**
[Watch free of charge at digitalconcerthall.com](http://digitalconcerthall.com)

professional assistance and recognition to talented instrumentalists and chamber ensembles, and the announcement of this year's award recipients is being hosted and live-streamed by New York's classical radio station, WQXR. It's not just announcements, either. There will also be live performances, and when previous award recipients include recent *Gramophone* 'One to Watch' violinist **Tessa Lark**, her fellow violinists **James Ehnes** and **Hilary Hahn**, pianists **Yuja Wang** and **Kirill Gerstein**, and the **Escher, Calder** and **JACK** quartets, we're expecting some top-drawer music-making from some rising names. wqxr.org

Orchestra Hall, Detroit & live online (free to view)

April 4 & 19

The **Detroit Symphony Orchestra** has two live webcasts on offer this month. The first finds

Eric Jacobsen conducting a programme which opens with Dvořák's *New World* Symphony, before moving to a world premiere commission of James Lee III's *American* which directly responds to Dvořák's symphony with a focus on Native American history. The programme ends with another new America themed work, Gabriel Kahane's poverty and homelessness-themed, *emergency shelter intake form*. The second concert finds **Markus Stenz** leading the DSO in Rachmaninov's Piano Concerto No 3 with **Alexander Gavrylyuk** as soloist, paired with music by Scriabin and Busoni. livefromorchestrahall.vhx.tv

Zipper Hall, Colburn School & live online (free to view)

April 5

This recital from Los Angeles's Colburn School sees cellist **Marc Coppey** perform a

chamber programme with its students in what is his first return to the school since his successful 2017 debut there. The programme opens with Beethoven's Piano Trio Op 70 No 2, continues with Ravel's *Introduction and Allegro*, then concludes with Brahms's String Sextet No 1.

colburnschool.edu/livestream/

Wigmore Hall

April 6

Pianist **Leon McCawley**'s Schubert-playing both in concert and on recordings has been widely praised, so it's great news that Wigmore Hall is live-streaming this recital of his which opens with Schubert's late A major Piano Sonata. Moving onwards, the programme continues in lyrical strain with Janáček's *On An Overgrown Path* Book 1. Three Grieg pieces follow before the recital concludes with Schumann's *Kreisleriana*.

wigmore-hall.org

Trinity Church Wall Street & live online (free to view)

April 6 & 20

A reminder that all the concerts from Manhattan's Trinity Church Wall Street are video-streamed live, and of their regular slots, the **Bach + 1** series is well worth getting into the habit of checking in on. This pairs one Bach cantata with one by another composer of any period, and this month's Bach choices are No 17, *Wer Dank opfert, der preiset mich* and No 18, *Gleichwie der Regen und Schnee vom Himmel fällt*. For both of these, Music Director **Julian Wachner** leads not just the choir but also **Trinity Church Baroque Orchestra**.

trinitywallstreet.org, trinitywallstreet.org/videos/music

Metropolitan Opera, New York & cinemas worldwide

April 11

Sir David McVicar's staging of Puccini's *Tosca* is the April cinema broadcast from the Metropolitan Opera. **Anna Netrebko** sings the title role, and she's joined by **Brian Jagde** as Cavaradossi and **Michael Volle** as Scarpia. **Bertrand de Billy** conducts.

metopera.org/season/in-cinemas

Staatsoper, Munich & STAATSOPER.TV

April 11

Easily the most intriguing of this month's operatic offerings, *7 Deaths of Callas* is a brand-new production created for **Bavarian State Opera** by performance artist and film maker **Marina Abramović**. Always fascinated by Maria Callas, Abramović has created seven films with actor **Willem Dafoe** in which she reenacts seven of Callas's onstage deaths. Then at the end of the performance – with the real death of Callas in 1977 in Paris – she performs onstage as herself. Musically, there's the well-known arias from the 19th- and 20th-centuries you'd hope for (most notably from *Tosca*), but there's new music too, because they're woven together with a newly commissioned score by Serbian composer **Marko Nikodijević**.

staatsoper.de

Concertgebouw, Amsterdam & online (free to view)

April 12

The Concertgebouw's April live-streamed Sunday morning concert is given by the **Flanders Symphony Orchestra** under **Kristiina Poska**. Bruch's Violin Concerto opens their programme, with the Dutch fiddler **Liza Ferschtman** as soloist. The second work on

the programme is Beethoven's ever-popular Symphony No 5.

concertgebouw.nl/en/live-streams

Barbican Hall, London & medici.tv

April 19

The opening concert of viola player **Antoine Tamestit**'s season-long LSO Artist Portrait is an unusually visual one for an orchestral programme, because its main event is Jörg Widmann's Viola Concerto – a work written for Tamestit, which sends him walking through the orchestra as he plays, using extended techniques, experimental sounds and body percussion. **Daniel Harding** conducts the London Symphony Orchestra, and Bruckner's Fifth closes the concert.

lso.co.uk; medici.tv

Philharmonie, Berlin & Digital Concert Hall

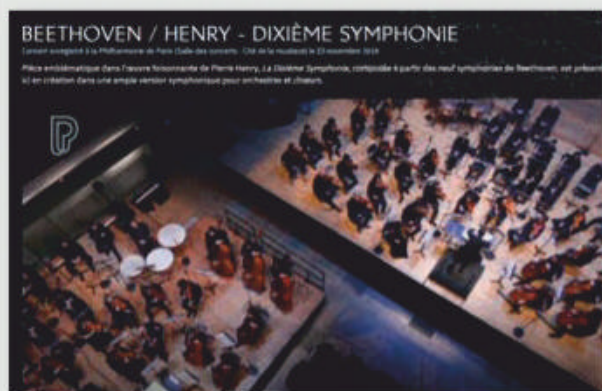
April 19 & 20

The first of the Berlin Philharmonic's live-streamed concerts this month sees the orchestra and **Kirill Petrenko** bring Beethoven's *Fidelio* home, following their performances at the Baden-Baden Easter Festival. The Berlin Philharmonic's current Artist-in-Residence **Marlis Petersen** sings the title role with **Matthew Polenzani** as Florestan. Beethoven then also dominates the following evening's programme by the **German National Youth Orchestra** conducted by **Christoph Altstaedt**, and in a thoroughly unique way: two pieces by contemporary composers – Brett Dean's *Testament* and a new commission for orchestra and electric guitar by Mark Barden and played by Adrian Peyrera – which are integrated between the movements of Beethoven's *Eroica* Symphony.

digitalconcerthall.com

ARCHIVE CONCERT REVIEW

All the right notes, but not necessarily in the right order: prepare to be bewildered by Beethoven X



Henry

Not the sketches worked up by Barry Cooper but the iconoclastic remix of the canonical nine by Pierre Henry, pioneer of *musique concrète*. Dying in 2017, Henry had long dreamed of his tape piece from 1979 becoming flesh. Here it is, premiered in Paris at the end of last

year: three orchestras (in the finale, a chorus and a tenor too), antiphonally disposed, chewing up and spitting out fragments of Beethoven.

Two of the conductors – Pascal Rophé and Bruno Mantovani – have experience of directing Stockhausen's *Gruppen*, which is just as well; the third is a rising star, Marzena Diakun. The Seventh Symphony's opening chord introduces the oboe soliloquy from the Fifth's first movement, but no sooner have the *Eroica*'s Scherzo and finale intervened, both at once, than a rising motif from the Fourth falls through its own rickety staircase.

So it continues for eight movements and 70 minutes, an act of homage in the

spirit of Nono's *Sankt Bach-Passion* from Henry to the predecessor who showed him how to compose, he said, even more than his actual teacher, Messiaen. 'Life is very simple, with its monotonous, repetitive, maddening and even sly moments, but also with its suspense and surprises.' Henry's *Beethoven X* is like that, as impressive and pointless as a talking fish, yet never as random or self-conscious as it sounds on paper, a joke that goes on too long at the same time as a live, serious and uncanny realisation of how this music literally runs around our minds, unmoored from sense or context.

Peter Quantrill

<https://live.philharmoniedeparis.fr/concert/1104999.html>

ORANGES & LEMONS

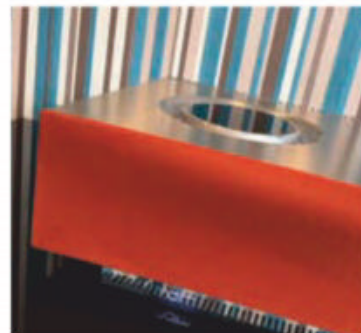
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Andrew Everard, Audio Editor

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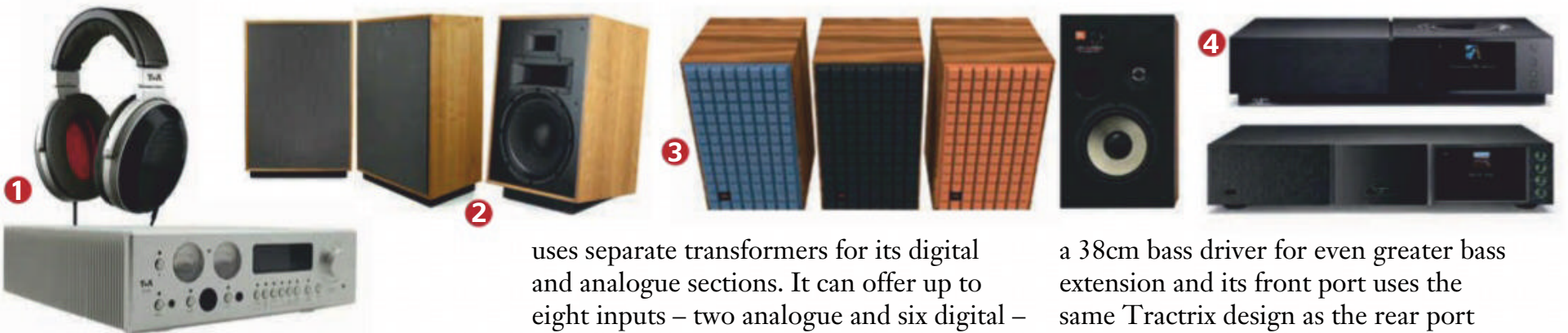
A fine set of Bach by the viol consort Phantasm, treated to a lovely 192kHz/24-bit Studio Master recording on the Linn label.



Iván Fischer's account of Beethoven's Fifth shines in Channel Classics' choice of DSD formats, while the multichannel versions are even more immersive.

Extensions, revivals and more

From new product avenues to the return of classic designs, the industry offers further listening opportunities



Headphones are big business, with interest in 'personal listening' ranging from inexpensive in-ear models to high-end designs built for the ultimate sound quality at home. Brands, both new and established, continue to join the fray, and the latest is the German company T+A, with both a high-end pair of headphones and a combined digital-to-analogue converter and headphone amplifier. The company – the initials stand for Theory and Application – has been established in Herford for more than 40 years but the £4800 Solitaire P **1** is its first venture into headphones. Joining the brand's flagship Solitaire speaker range, it's a planar-magnetostatic design, using an ultra-lightweight diaphragm driven across its entire surface to give 'a spacious, airy feel unique even for planar headphones'. The rest of the construction uses aircraft-grade aluminium and soft leather.

Launched close behind the headphones is the HA200 DAC/headphone amplifier, selling for £6600. It uses the company's True 1 Bit converter technology, compatible with music at up to 768kHz/32-bit and DSD1024, and has three sets of outputs, individually tuneable to suit the headphones in use. It's based on T+A's HV (high voltage) topology, making it able to drive even demanding loads, and

uses separate transformers for its digital and analogue sections. It can offer up to eight inputs – two analogue and six digital – with the option of an HDMI input board.

From brand-new to 'new but old', speaker company Klipsch's latest Heritage Series speakers are now available in the UK. The Heresy IV and Cornwall IV **2** models are based on designs by company founder Paul W Klipsch and have been reworked and revoiced for use with modern equipment. The Heresy IV (£3500 a pair) owes its name to a comment from an acquaintance of Klipsch that the design was a violation of the principles of corner-horn speakers – an 'acoustic heresy'. Klipsch took the name and ran with it, launching the speaker in 1957, and the design went on to be one of the company's most popular models.

The new version of the Heritage IV uses a titanium diaphragm tweeter, a polyamide mid-range compression driver with a Tractrix horn and a 30cm bass driver. The crossover, based on the original steep-slope design, has been reworked for more accurate sound, efficiency and power handling, while the speaker now uses a rear-venting port for increased bass extension. Standing 63cm tall, the Heritage IV is a compact floorstanding model with a tilted base and comes in Satin Black Ash, American Walnut, Natural Cherry and Distressed Oak veneers.

The larger Cornwall IV, selling for £6500/pr and standing 96.5cm tall, uses

a 38cm bass driver for even greater bass extension and its front port uses the same Tractrix design as the rear port on the Heresy IV. Available in American Walnut, Natural Cherry and Satin Black Ash veneers, it also shares the 'riser' base design of the smaller model.

Talking of revived classics, JBL is building on the success of its re-engineered L100 Classic speaker with the launch of the L82 Classic **3**, a smaller version of the 1970 design that went on to become one of the company's all-time best sellers. Selling for £2000/pr, with the accompanying JS-80 stands at £175/pr, the L82s have the signature Quadrex 'foam block' grille of the original, available in black, blue or orange. Designed as mirror-image pairs, the speakers use a 25mm tweeter with an acoustic lens waveguide and a front-panel attenuator, and a 20cm woofer with a white poly cone, tuned with a front-venting Slipstream port.

With so many streaming services now available, manufacturers are racing to add them to their products and Naim has announced native Qobuz support for its latest network audio ranges **4**. Available via a free firmware update, Qobuz joins Tidal in being available for the Uniti Atom, Star and Nova, and ND5 XS2, NDX 2 and ND 555, with an update for the Mu-so 2 and Mu-so Qb 2 to follow. Users will need a Qobuz subscription: Naim is offering a free one-month trial via a link in the control app, available for Android and iOS. **6**

● REVIEW PRODUCT OF THE MONTH

Cyrus ONE Cast

Combining the simplicity and compact appeal of the company's design with innovative wireless capability, this little amp also delivers a powerful, mature sound



CYRUS ONE CAST

Type Integrated amplifier

Price £1299

Output 100Wpc into 8 ohms

Digital inputs HDMI ARC, asynchronous USB Type B, coaxial, optical

Analogue inputs Moving magnet phono, line audio (configurable to fixed AV bypass)

Analogue outputs One pair of speakers, headphones

Network connectivity Wi-Fi

Accessories supplied Wi-Fi antennae, remote handset

Dimensions (WxHxD) 22x8.5x39cm
cyrusaudio.com

As regular readers of these pages will have realised, it seems every manufacturer has its own spin on the brave, not-so-new world of 'computer music'. From separate network music player components to all-in-one systems and even stand-alone wireless speakers, and from components designed to play from local storage to those optimised for internet streaming services, there's now a wide – and still rapidly growing – choice of solutions available.

These days, all but the least expensive AV receivers offer network audio alongside their video and surround audio facilities, not to mention multiple channels of amplification. In the two-channel

amplifier market, where keeping designs pure is more of a concern, the uptake of networking has understandably been slower – but things are changing.

As already mentioned, each company approaches this whole 'computer music' thing in a different manner, given the variety of connectivity paths on offer, and Cyrus has very much taken its own way with the ONE Cast. At its heart this is the ONE amplifier, recalling the company's original product of 1984, launched as a simple but highly effective no-frills design in the 'shoebox' casework that would go on to set the style for all subsequent amps from the company. The name was revived in 2016 for an affordable entry-level model

to sit below the main line-up, featuring a moving magnet phono stage, Bluetooth and 100W per channel output, while an 'HD' version was added a couple of years later, complete with onboard DAC able to accept audio at up to 192kHz/32-bit and DSD128 via an asynchronous USB connection from a computer.

The £1299 ONE Cast continues those incremental additions, maintaining the features of the other two models, including an analogue input configurable to fixed-gain 'AV' operation and a pre-amp output for further system expansion, but adding not just a streaming solution but also an HDMI input for use when the amplifier is

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combined with video sources, such as the output from a TV. That's in addition to its optical and coaxial ins, plus of course that moving magnet phono stage.

The chosen streaming solution here is Google's Cast audio system, which enables direct streaming from tablet/smartphone apps including Spotify, Apple Music, Tidal, Qobuz, Deezer and more. Indeed, Cyrus explains that streaming to the ONE Cast is a simple matter of two taps on the device being used – select the music you want to play and then select the amplifier, just as you would a smart speaker.

Let the ONE Cast fly with some uncompressed audio sources and this little amplifier plays its socks off

Actually, that's just one of the streaming solutions here. The amplifier also offers standard Bluetooth and Apple's AirPlay, and can even be voice-operated, using Apple's Siri, Google Assistant and Amazon Alexa. To enable all this the Cyrus connects to the user's home network via Wi-Fi, using two short antennae screwed on to mounts at either end of the rear panel. I'm a little disappointed not to see an Ethernet socket as well, as this usually offers the most stable network connection – but then most people will use Wi-Fi, and it proves more than adequate for the needs of the amplifier.

Otherwise the ONE Cast is much as the other models in the range. It uses hybrid Class D power amplification, with a Speaker Impedance Detection system to optimise the output to the speakers in use, has a headphone socket with its own Class AB amplification and comes complete with a compact remote handset.

As ever with products of this kind, updates are downloaded automatically via the internet; but a neat touch is that, in place of a conventional printed manual, Cyrus provides a series of 'walkthrough' websites and videos covering the set-up of the various capabilities of the amplifier. That makes configuration and operation simple and intuitive, to the extent that a manual on paper is never missed – though

if you really want one for reference, it can be downloaded from the Cyrus website.

PERFORMANCE

Unless you're intending to use the ONE Cast with AirPlay, it needs to be set up using Google Cast, in order to connect it to your home Wi-Fi network. That's all easy and clear, as is, for example, setting it up to work with Alexa voice control, for which you'll need to instal an Alexa 'skill' and another app on your portable device. Once set up and functioning, however, all is plain sailing.

The ONE Cast sounds very good with streaming services – including BBC Sounds – and the ease with which it can be accessed from the palm of your hand makes it an ideal all-day listening companion. The sound is warm, smooth and yet well detailed and dynamic, meaning it can make the most even of the lower bit-rates on offer with some streaming services. True, the results aren't the last word in fidelity – for that you need uncompressed CD-quality audio or better, injected from a computer using the asynchronous USB input or from a turntable via the rather good phono tag here – but the Cyrus is never less than consistently listenable. That applied as much to spoken word as it did to Radio 3's live concert relays, while streaming music via Tidal was similarly impressive.

However, let it fly with those uncompressed audio sources and this little amplifier plays its socks off. With the classic Vienna Philharmonic/Boskovsky recordings of the Strauss waltzes and polkas, made in the 1960s and '70s and released on Esoteric SACD, the Cyrus revels in the warmth of the 'with chorus' version of the *Blue Danube* and blazes through the *Radetzky March*. And with the recent Michael Stern/Kansas City Symphony recording of Holst's most famous work, which is so much more than 'just another *Planets*', the ability of the Cyrus to power out 'Mars' before highlighting the rhythms and orchestral depth of 'Jupiter' and 'Uranus' displays a maturity and definition beyond the expectations of a 'fully loaded' amplifier at this level.

That's what the ONE Cast does so well: it offers all the bells and whistles some

Or you could try ...

As already mentioned, there's no shortage of options for those wanting to stream music or play files from computer storage.

Onkyo TX-8390

Onkyo's TX-8390, for example, is a very comprehensive package, and great value. It's a stereo receiver complete with network streaming, digital inputs including a USB-B for computer connection and no fewer than six HDMI's for TV sound, and supports files up to 384kHz/32-bit and DSD256. It even supports Amazon Alexa and Apple Siri voice commands. Find out more at uk.onkyo.com.



Marantz PM7000N

Marantz has a strong reputation when it comes to combining traditional audiophile values with up-to-date technologies, and the company has historically been a loyal supporter of SACD. It's no surprise, therefore, that its latest model, the PM7000N, takes its best-selling amp design and adds a comprehensive suite of digital audio capabilities. With asynchronous USB for computer connection, AirPlay and Bluetooth, access to a range of streaming services and built-in HEOS multiroom audio capability, this is very much a complete audio solution. Read more at marantz.co.uk.



NAD M10

A rather different take on the whole 'network amplifier' idea is NAD's M10, which is much more of a 'system in one box'. With its large display taking up the entire front panel, wide-ranging format compatibility and 'just add speakers' appeal, this is a very slick package, operated by the excellent BluOS streaming/multiroom software. See more at nadelectronics.com.



expect of a modern amplifier but does so without losing sight of the fundamentals of fine design and engineering. Yes, it's a bit light on conventional inputs, but that's the only price to be paid for its impressive flexibility. **G**

● REVIEW iFi AUDIO ZEN DAC/ZEN BLUE

And Zen there were two

iFi Audio's entry-level range now offers you a choice of ways to connect a computer to your hi-fi system

Way back in the early days of what we used to call 'computer audio' – and here we're talking just a few years ago! – the 'how do I connect my computer to the hi-fi?' question was one of the most frequent arrivals in my email inbox. What's more, it continues to crop up, as people seek a simple means to dip a toe in the 'new hi-fi' stream.

It's fortunate, therefore, that there's now a plethora of devices enabling us to plug a computer in at one end and a line audio output to an amplifier or system at the other, or even just acting as a Bluetooth bridge for a phone to play back music. With the range of services constantly expanding, with the arrival of everything from Amazon's Music HD to the BBC's much-vaunted Sounds, that's no bad thing.

Among the latest arrivals is a pair of little boxes from one of the established players in this sector of the market, UK-based iFi Audio, in the form of its very affordable Zen range. I'd actually requested for review just one of the two, the £129 Zen DAC, but was offered a Zen Blue as well, since a package was already being shipped to me. I'm glad I took up the offer: selling for the same price, the Blue enabled me to compare the two methods of connection, wired and wireless, and proved as impressive in its own way as the original subject of this review.

For its price, the Zen DAC is a remarkably comprehensive product. Just 10cm wide and 3cm tall, it nevertheless combines the functions of DAC, headphone amplifier and pre-amplifier, with fully balanced working to minimise noise, the choice of single-ended and balanced outputs for both headphones and analogue output to power amplifiers or powered speakers, and fixed or variable pre-amp outputs to allow it to be used with conventional amplifiers and pre-amps. Input is on a USB 3.0 B-Type connector, which is of course USB 2.0-compatible and for which a USB-A-to-B cable is supplied. As standard the Zen DAC is also powered via USB, but has an input socket to allow it to be used with an optional offboard power supply: iFi's own iPower unit is around £50.

The Zen DAC has a prominent volume control on its front panel, along with

a multicolour LED indication of the incoming file format: it can handle PCM at up to 384kHz, DSD64/128 and also MQA-encoded files and streams, with the True Native Burr-Brown DAC used offering bit-perfect conversion. The DAC also uses iFi's own firmware, with various versions available for user installation via the company's website. With these one can, for example, extend the unit's capability to DSD256 when used with Mac computers, albeit at the expense of MQA compatibility, or give the DAC the ability to upsample all digital inputs rather than offering native working. Two proprietary iFi technologies are selected by front-panel buttons: PowerMatch can boost the output for more demanding headphone loads – not that the unit lacks power even in its 'low' setting – while TrueBass is 'an analogue circuit designed to 'add back' the lost bass response [of some headphones] for the most accurate playback'.

Outputs are provided on a 6.3mm unbalanced headphone socket and a 4.4mm Pentaconn balanced one, while to the rear another 4.4mm provides a balanced pre-amp output alongside unbalanced RCA sockets. A switch on the rear panel allows a choice between standard line-level output and variable pre-amp output, controlled by the central volume knob.

The Zen Blue supports 'all current and future Bluetooth audio formats', according to iFi Audio, these including aptX HD, Sony's preferred LDAC and Huawei's choice, HWA, with Qualcomm's latest chipset supporting Bluetooth 5.0, and an ESS Sabre DAC. Like the DAC, the Blue offers a choice of unbalanced and balanced outputs, here only at fixed level, with a switch selecting between these and coaxial/optical digital out.

PERFORMANCE

While the star of the show – at least for those interested in 'beyond CD' audio – is undoubtedly the Zen DAC, it's impressive just how enjoyable the sound of the Zen Blue can be, whether with live BBC Sounds streams of Radio 3 concerts or the likes of Tidal and Apple Music. Tried with a variety of Android and iOS devices, the Zen Blue pleases with its combination of smoothness and weight, especially when run balanced via



iFi AUDIO ZEN DAC

Type DAC/headphone amp/pre-amp

Price £129

Inputs USB-B, coaxial/optical digital

Outputs Balanced/unbalanced headphones; balanced/unbalanced analogue with line/variable switching

Accessories supplied USB-A to USB-B cable, unbalanced analogue interconnect

Dimensions (WxHxD) 10x3x11.7cm



iFi AUDIO ZEN BLUE

Type Bluetooth audio adaptor

Price £129

Outputs Balanced/unbalanced analogue, coaxial/optical digital

Accessories supplied Power supply, Bluetooth antenna

Dimensions (WxHxD) 10x3.5x15.8cm

ifi-audio.com

an adaptor cable, providing a detailed, involving listen.

However, the Zen DAC, used on the end of a Mac computer and playing music from CD-quality FLACs to DSD128 or even 256, is a superb demonstration of what a modern affordable DAC can do. Whether run as a headphone amp, for which I used both Bowers & Wilkins P9 Signature headphones and – in balanced mode – Oppo's PM-1, as a DAC or as a complete digital converter/pre-amp, the value for money offered by the DAC is remarkable and the well-balanced, rich yet open sound extremely satisfying.

Using it both 'self-powered' and with an external linear power supply showed that the latter gave just a little more detail, especially in the midband and treble, suggesting the optional iPower supply might be worth considering; but one need have no worries that the compact unit won't have enough 'oomph' to drive difficult headphone loads. Indeed, I found the 'high' setting to be rather too sudden for my tastes and stuck with 'low' for most of my listening. And the TrueBass function? Well, it might be useful for some lightweight-sounding 'phones but otherwise is just a frill on what is a very accomplished headphones-and-more solution. **G**

● ESSAY

There's more to immersive audio than trite effects

With some of the most innovative labels – including 2L and Channel Classics – exploring the possibilities of multichannel recording, it's time to take a fresh look at surround sound

As the old joke has it, 'How many ears did Davy Crockett have?', to which the answer of course was 'Three – left, right, and his wild front ear'. Yes, groansome I know, but I was interested to read the other day one of the oft-repeated myths of audio, which was this time expressed along the lines of 'We only have two ears, so why do we need any more than two speakers – it's just a gimmick, designed to sell foolish listeners more equipment'.

That such a view is some way wide of the mark is perhaps evidenced by the continued growth of multichannel audio recordings and the work of audio engineers striving to make more of this kind of three-dimensional audio. I was pleased to see, for example, that the recent Grammy Awards recognised – at last – the work of Morten Lindberg, founder and driving force of the Norwegian label 2L. He has been nominated several times but this time picked up the winner's trophy in the Best Immersive Audio Album category for the label's 'Lux' release.

This recording – by Anita Brevik, the Trondheim Soloists and the Nidaros Cathedral Girls' Choir – could be described as typical of 2L's output if it weren't for the diverse range of albums this label produces every year. What it does typify, however, is the company's meticulous recordings, using its own microphone rig often in church acoustics, and the mastery it shows of multichannel techniques that add to, rather than detracting from, the content being performed. Even when the label goes for a recording as much about its acoustic as its content – such as the very unusual 'Tomba sonora', recorded in the highly reverberant mausoleum the Norwegian artist Emanuel Vigeland built for himself at Slemdal, near Oslo – one is aware that it's not doing so as a gimmick but to capture something unique.

As Lindberg has written about this recording: 'The acoustics of this mausoleum are a significant part of the multisensory immersive experience any visitor will encounter. The darkness,



'Tomba sonora' in the Emanuel Vigeland Mausoleum near Oslo

the low temperature and the high humidity enhance one's sensitivity to sound. The hard surfaces of the stone walls, unrelieved by any windows, reflect the sound from all directions and one feels enveloped by it – at times with an irresistible depth of feeling. The sound waves meet little resistance and only gradually decay between the hard surfaces – this gives a long and rich reverberation.'

He continues. 'Performers' interaction is also strongly affected by this reverberation, something musical phrasing has to take into account. In this rich acoustic it can be extremely difficult to hear oneself and to hear others. The long reverberation calls for slower tempi, reduced dynamics, gentler articulation, and, not least, very patient listening. So all in all it is a challenging venue ... Perceived reverberance, more precisely called Early Decay Time (EDT), is measured by an acoustic parameter, and in a typical concert hall it would be 1-3 seconds. In the mausoleum of Vigeland the EDT parameter measures 13 seconds.'

In other words, one almost couldn't think of a worse venue for a recording, especially if you're an adherent to the 'maximum clarity, total detail' school of hi-fi. And yet it works wonderfully when played back on a multichannel system, the recorded acoustic closing in around the listener.

2L is far from the only label now producing recordings of this kind: take a look at the catalogue of specialist online retailer NativeDSD.com and you'll find

no shortage of multichannel releases in everything from DSD64 to DXD, many of them created with similar skill and attention to detail. For example, the recordings made by Channel Classics founder – and NativeDSD head – Jared Sacks make full use of the ambience of the recording venue to enhance the performance. Listen, for example, to the recent set of Rachmaninov by Anna Fedorova (see the review on page 71) to hear this combination and spaciousness

much in evidence: it's a long way from the old school idea of 'soloist spotlight with orchestra behind', and immensely more enjoyable as a result.

Fascinating, too, are the recordings Sacks makes for his Just Listen label, which specialises in minimal, 'one take, no edits' sessions. Not only is there a palpable impression of being at the heart of the music, but the performances have an exciting immediacy often missing from more 'constructed' recordings.

There's more to immersive audio than just those trite special effects. Yes, we do only have two ears, but of course we can hear sounds from all around us: it's how we judge the size of the space in which we find ourselves; and of course, if our ancestors hadn't been able to detect the odd sabre-toothed tiger sneaking up on them in their visual blind-spot, chances are we wouldn't have been here today reading *Gramophone*.

While a pair of speakers set up to give the correct stereophonic effect can work miracles when it comes to suggesting the size and acoustic properties of the recording venue, as captured by the engineering team, it's still a bit like listening with blinkers on. The acoustic surrounding us is still that of our listening room, not the location of the performance we're enjoying. Add in extra speakers behind us and a skilfully sympathetic recording of the space as well as the performers, and it's possible to 'push out' the walls of the room and recreate all the echoes, reverberation and 'air' of the recording. Then you have a truly magical listening experience. 🎧

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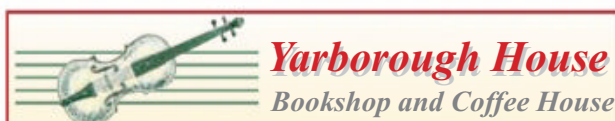
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NOTES & LETTERS

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Alicia de Larrocha's Brahms

I hope that Jed Distler's welcome 'Icons' article on Alicia de Larrocha (March, page 60) rekindles interest in a pianist who for too long now has stood in danger of being overlooked. Listening again recently to her wonderful Rachmaninov Third Piano Concerto with André Previn and the LSO in lovely 1970s Kingsway Hall/Decca sound, it remains a mystery to me, a mere vicarious musician, how her tiny hands could negotiate those stretches with astonishingly little discernible re-apportioning of Rachmaninov's writing. Jed mentions an 'unissued' 1981 broadcast of Brahms's Piano Concerto No 2 with Eugen Jochum. It *is* in fact available – online and on a Weitblick CD. Bold, projected playing, not perfect but irresistible.

Andrew Keener
New Malden, Surrey

John Wilson's style

Thank you for Richard Bratby's terrific interview with the conductor John Wilson (February, page 14). I fully concur with the opinion that orchestras should have 'style', not 'a style'. When, as a teen, I first became aware that prominent orchestras were noted for having an attendant characteristic sound, I found it odd. It seemed to me that any orchestra ought to be like a painter's blank canvas, its mandate being solely to convey the composer's intent. In this regard, and bearing in mind Bratby's observation that 'Previn's MGM Studio orchestration of *My Fair Lady* should not be played like Robert Russell Bennett's arrangement for a pit band', I look forward to comparing the John Wilson Orchestra's BBC Proms recording, 'Gershwin in Hollywood' (Warner Classics, 6/16) with the Sinfonia of London's Korngold (Chandos, 10/19). In addition to the Gershwin, the article has also inspired me to go back and explore Wilson's previous treatment of Eric Coates and Richard Rodney Bennett.

Mark Edward Hendricks
Wilton Manors, FL, USA

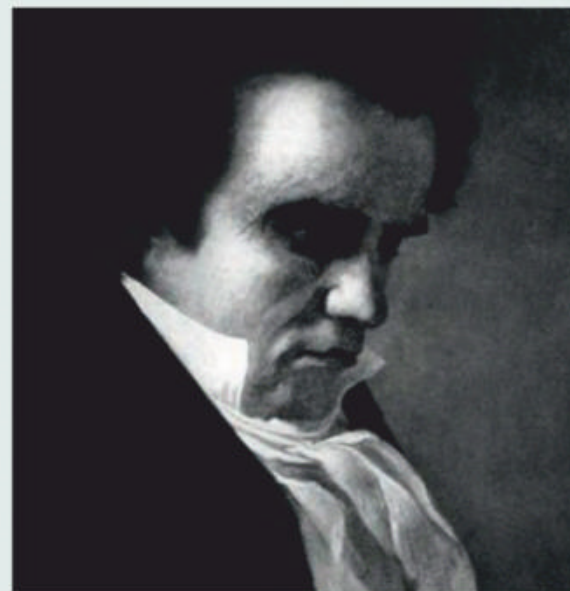
... and his work with the NYO

A few years ago I was privileged to be at the final concert of the National Youth Orchestra's Winter season at the Barbican. As a NYO supporter I've heard many great performances over the years,

Letter of the Month

Beethoven's struggle

It was heroic of him, and beneficial to us, to have Peter Quantrill's overview of various Beethoven collections (February, page 96). His remark about the struggle Beethoven faced and the transcendence he achieved in so much of his work seems spot on. Alfred Einstein's remark about Beethoven looking into the void and yet still making an affirmation for the ages is *echt*-Beethoven. Which leads to my question about all three boxes, do we get a sense of Beethoven as perhaps the greatest transcendentalist? PQ is a fair, and as far as I know, accurate judge of the quality of performances. Yet we are talking about ensemble, matters of metronome, sound: all of which contribute to our pleasure. And while pleasure is a worthy goal, it doesn't come close to the essence of Beethoven. So what is missing? The failure to reveal both the struggle and the transcendent. An example that combines both is probably Furtwängler in Berlin in 1942. He and the reduced orchestra, shorn of Hitler's Untermensch, affirm the worth of all humanity. You sense the difficulties of the music and in this place



Beethoven's struggle needs communicating

of unremitting evil, you feel every note rejects it.

Twenty years later the Berlin Philharmonic gives us a superb series of Beethoven performances, but one that does not reveal the struggle and thus is slightly lesser.

All great Beethoven performance needs not only triumph, but the struggle Beethoven undertook to get there.

John Horan
Gettysburg, PA, USA

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but this I rate as the greatest, entirely due to the conducting of John Wilson.

It was clear that he'd formed a tremendous rapport with these enthusiastic young performers and the whole evening was a joy, but the highlight was an electrifying performance of Respighi's *The Pines of Rome*. The final section, as the Roman armies marched down the Appian Way, nearly took the roof off the Barbican. Admittedly, John Wilson had the

luxury of the NYO's enormous forces, but it was the interpretation, from the weary legions we first hear to the exhilarating triumphal march into Rome, trumpets blazing.

This performance I have never heard surpassed and now I see that John Wilson is including Respighi on one of his new recordings, I sincerely hope it will be of the Roman trilogy.

Kate Campbell
London SW8

OBITUARIES

REINBERT DE LEEUW

Pianist, composer and conductor

Born September 8, 1938

Died February 14, 2020



Known to many for his fine series of recordings of the piano music of Erik Satie for Philips, Reinbert de Leeuw was a musician whose fascination for the

music of the 20th century enriched musical life for half a century.

Born to psychiatrist parents, de Leeuw studied at the conservatories in Amsterdam and The Hague, later teaching at the Royal Conservatoire in The Hague and at Leiden University.

In 1974 he founded the Schönberg Ensemble which specialised in music of the 20th century, from the Second Viennese School onwards. A major figure in Dutch musical life, he conducted many of the country's major ensembles and choirs, often writing music for them. He also appeared with numerous European orchestras – he was guest artistic director of the Aldeburgh Festival in 1992 and from 1994 to 1998 was artistic director of the Tanglewood Festival of Contemporary Music. As a conductor he was involved in the creation or early performances of operatic works by Louis Andriessen, Ligeti, Claude Vivier and Robert Zuidam as well as major work by Britten and Stravinsky.

In 1981, Philips released a much-admired three-LP set of early piano music by Satie which put de Leeuw's name in front of a larger audience, though his interest in the composer first bore fruit at the Holland Festivals of 1983 and 1984. Reviewing the set, Max Harrison wrote that 'they are all marked *Très lent*, which is how Reinbert de Leeuw plays them. In fact he has the courage to play most of this music as slowly as the composer evidently wanted. Many "interpreters" feel that such pieces must be livened up, whereas the point is that they are almost as free of the ego as some medieval music. This is even true of the Sarabandes (1887), with their once-controversial harmony, and again de Leeuw holds to steady, very slow tempos.' De Leeuw's championing of rare Satie continued more recently with a recording with Barbara Hannigan of the song cycle *Socrate* and other songs for Winter & Winter. Peter Quantrill commented that 'the introverted discretion of de Leeuw's

pianism is weighted to perfection during the six *Mélodies*'. The Hannigan partnership, which also embraced music by Andriessen, Jan van de Putte and Henry Brant, continued on record with an album, 'Vienna. Fin de siècle', for Alpha Classics, reviewed in December 2018.

A recording of Reinbert de Leeuw's edition of Mahler's *Das Lied von der Erde* (with Lucile Richardot and Yves Saelens) will be released by Alpha this autumn.

HAMISH MILNE

Pianist and teacher

Born April 27, 1939

Died February 12, 2020



The British pianist Hamish Milne has died at the age of 80. Best known for his advocacy of the music of Nikolai Medtner, Milne's discography was broad and

adventurous: as well as many recordings for CRD, including a survey of Medtner's solo piano works, he also recorded for Hyperion, Chandos, Decca and Danacord. His finest recordings include one of his first: in 1977 his pioneering accounts of Julius Reubke's Piano Sonata and Liszt's Fantasy and Fugue on 'Ad nos, ad salutarem undam', an organ work freely transcribed by Busoni, appeared on Decca's L'Oiseau-Lyre imprint; this is now available on Decca Eloquence. Other highlights include a two-disc set of Medtner's complete *Skazki* ('Tales') and an album of Russian Bach transcriptions, both on Hyperion.

Milne was born in Salisbury to Scottish parents, and went to Bishop Wordsworth's Grammar School. He studied at the Royal Academy of Music with Harold Craxton, and then later with the Busoni pupil Guido Agosti at the Accademia Chigiana in Siena. He credited the master classes he heard in Italy with artists including Alfred Cortot, Pablo Casals, Andrés Segovia and Sergui Celibidache as being of central importance to his artistic development. Milne went on to make many recordings for the BBC, as well as over 20 albums from Weber to Lyapunov. Milne was a pianist who wore his virtuosity lightly; he was not one for ostentatious display, and was a consummate chamber musician. Alongside his performing career, he had a long and fulfilling teaching career as a professor at the Royal Academy of Music.

NEXT MONTH
MAY 2019



Stephen Hough plays Beethoven

Jeremy Nicholas travels to Helsinki to hear Stephen Hough recording Beethoven's five piano concertos with Hannu Lintu, and finds some surprises in store

Being Thomas Adès

Peter Quantrill meets the in-demand British composer to discuss his solo piano recording of Janáček, composing for ballet, and other major upcoming projects

Brahms's Clarinet Sonatas

Mark Pullinger locks himself away with a pile of recordings of Brahms's two late clarinet sonatas, Op 120, and recommends a top version

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

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


































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Gundula Janowitz

The great soprano on a composer whose music has threaded its way through her singing career

My credo has always been that we don't go in search of the music, rather the music finds us. Beethoven has been a companion ever since I was studying in Graz when I was 16. My teacher gave me two pieces to learn – *Die Himmel rühmen* by Beethoven and an *Agnus dei* by Bizet.

It wasn't until 1962 that I encountered the Ninth Symphony. Herbert von Karajan asked me if I would sing the soprano part. I said yes, but until the recording I hadn't heard the work and I hadn't sung it before! At the time it didn't seem hard but I only later realised that, yes, it really is pretty difficult. We recorded it in the Jesus-Christus Kirche in Berlin for the cycle that Karajan made for DG, we then did it for the opening of the Philharmonie – it was a great moment.

Beethoven's *Fidelio* is, for me, the first work that transfers the patterns of speech into music. He's the first composer who could take the way we talk and turn it into musical expression. It's written in a way that's so natural – you don't breathe between the words. It's written as a complete musical idea, yet it conveys all the wonder and hesitancy. Take the quartet in Act 1: 'Mir ... ist ... so ... Wunderbar' – it's quite miraculous. Or the start of the slow section – 'Komm Hoffnung' – in Leonore's big aria – the way he expresses her sense of being without hope, and seemingly helpless, yet desperate to do something. For me the basis of this opera is 'Hope is the last thing that dies', nothing else ...

I first sang Marzelline in 1962 with Karajan conducting, and Christa Ludwig as Leonore and Jon Vickers as Florestan. Then about ten years later Karajan asked me to sing Leonore. At the time I simply felt it was too soon, so I went along to the audition and sang the big aria as if it were a Schubert Lied – very beautifully and very controlled. Afterwards Karajan looked me in the eye and said 'You're a clever girl!' – he knew exactly what I'd done – and the idea was dropped.

My first Leonore was with Zubin Mehta conducting, in Israel and then in Orange – which was filmed. It was a very special way of filming because every singer had his or her own cameraman, and I had a young man called Jean-Luc who stood beside me the whole evening to capture the emotions of the other singers who were reacting to me. When it came to the end of the opera – 'O Gott, welch ein Augenblick' – I was crying but I didn't stop, but the *filming* had to stop because Jean-Luc was on the floor and he was crying! He said 'I was behind this woman, I lived with her the whole evening and when I saw her tears, it was too much.' So sweet!

Later Solti asked me to sing it in a concert performance, but almost immediately the Vienna State Opera called – I was then



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under contract with them – and asked me to sing it. I couldn't say no. The conductor of the Vienna *Fidelio* was Leonard Bernstein (we'd actually done a *Missa solennis* together about ten years before). He didn't want me – he wanted Gwyneth Jones – so there was no connection between us, no communication! So I was simply singing for myself. Shortly afterwards Karajan asked me to sing the soprano part in the Brahms Requiem with him at Salzburg Easter Festival. After a concert with him he'd usually embrace me and say 'Until next time', but this time he kissed my hand and said 'Leben sie wohl' – 'Farewell'. And I knew that our musical relationship had come to an end because of that *Fidelio*. But I bore him no ill will. After my parents he was the most important person in my life. I really learned what music is singing with him.

Recently I was staying with some friends who have a castle near the Slovakian border, and they have a wonderful little chapel that seats about 100 people. One day I said what a perfect place it would be to listen to the *Missa solennis* – I was always singing it but never actually heard it. So that evening, they had a wonderful hi-fi set up there and we listened to it, just six of us. I didn't realise that it was my recording! It was so beautiful. We paused before the 'Incarnatus est' and I looked around and everyone had tears rolling down their cheeks – me included! It was so moving in this little Baroque church. And as I get older Beethoven means more and more to me. **G**



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GLORIA DEI CANTORES (Singers to the Glory of God) holds a passionate dedication to illuminate truth and beauty through choral artistry, celebrating a rich tradition of sacred choral music from Gregorian chant to the twenty-first century. Distributed internationally by NAXOS, the choir's discography of over 50 recordings showcases their extensive repertoire, encompassing both masterworks and rarely performed musical treasures.

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PREMIERES OF THE SEASON 2020/21

OPERA

LOHENGRIN

Richard Wagner
Nov. 07, 2020, Opera House

IL TROVATORE

Giuseppe Verdi
Nov. 29, 2020, Opera House

LES BARBARES

Camille Saint-Saëns
Mar. 27, 2021, Opera House

PARADIESE

Gerd Kühn / Hans-Ulrich Treichel
World Premiere
Jul. 03, 2021, Opera House

LEIPZIG BALLET

RITUALS

Mario Schröder | Music: Franz
Schubert and Tōru Takemitsu
Choreographic Premiere
Oct. 03, 2020, Opera House

FAUST

Edward Clug | Music: Milko Lazar
German Premiere
Feb. 06, 2021, Opera House

FUSION

Mario Schröder | Live Music:
Harry Jeff – Reeps 100
Choreographic Premiere
May 21, 2021, Opera House

MUSIKALISCHE KOMÖDIE

THE QUEEN OF MOVIES

Jean Gilbert
Dec. 11, 2020, Musikalische Komödie

SWEENEY TODD

Stephen Sondheim / Hugh Wheeler
Feb. 20, 2021, Musikalische Komödie

GRÄFIN MARIZA

Emmerich Kálmán
Apr. 24, 2021, Musikalische Komödie

BULLETS OVER BROADWAY THE MUSICAL

Woody Allen
Jun. 19, 2021, Musikalische Komödie

